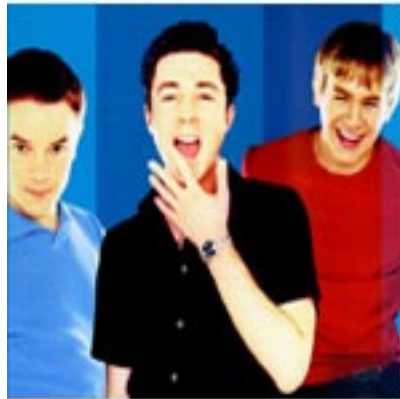


”That is so gay!”

-A textual analysis of gay male stereotypes in *Six Feet Under* and *Queer as Folk* (with a queer theoretical perspective)



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Preface

Thank You!

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Abstract

The aim of the thesis is to examine stereotypes of gay men, portrayed in the television series *Six feet under* (2001-2005) and *Queer as Folk* (1999-2000). The main research questions are: How are the gay characters represented? What are the differences and similarities of the representations, and what may explain the differences of the two series? Through theoretical perspectives from queer theory, the thesis investigates how the heteronormative attitudes, central in queer theory, affects the media and also if gay men encompass their own masculinities. Stereotypes of gay men have been analysed while using the theoretical frameworks of queer theory, masculinities, stereotypes, and mise-en-scene. A semiotic textual analysis was conducted in order to reveal how the gay characters were represented, and if they met any perceived stereotypes that mostly are based on prejudice. The effeminate man, the macho gay man, and the party twink are among the examples of gay stereotypes that were found when analysing the two texts. The conclusion is that both series encompass perceived stereotypes of gay men, either through the visual images that carries queer symbols, or within the narrative structure. Moreover, the stereotype of the effeminate gay man is present in both media text, which suggests that this stereotype penetrates time, cultures, and societies.

Sammendrag

Tema for oppgaven er stereotypier av den homofile mann i fjernsyn. Oppgavens mål er å utforske stereotypiske portretteringer i fjernsynsseriene *Six feet under* (2001-2005) og *Queer as folk* (1999-2000). Oppgavens hovedspørsmål er: Hvordan er de homofile mannlige karakterene representert? Hva er forskjellene og likhetene i disse representasjonene, og hva kan forklare forskjellene mellom de to TV-seriene? Gjennom å bruke teoretiske perspektiver fra queer theory, så vil oppgaven undersøke hvordan heteronormative holdninger sentralt i queer theory, påvirker media, og om homofile menn innehar deres egne maskuliniteter. Stereotypier av homofile menn har blitt analysert gjennom å bruke de teoretiske perspektivene om queer theory, maskuliniteter, stereotypier, og mise-en-scene. Det ble utført en tekstanalyse gjennom å bruke semiotiske virkemidler for å avdekke hvordan de homofile karakterene i TV-seriene var representert, og i hvilken grad stereotypiske fordommer ble møtt gjennom disse representasjonene. Eksempler på stereotypier som ble funnet i tekstanalysen er, den feminine mannen, macho homsen og den promiskuøse party homsen. Konklusjonen er at begge TV-seriene innehar stereotypiske representasjoner av homofile menn, enten gjennom de visuelle bildene vi møter som bærer skeive tegn, eller inne i narrasjonen til TV-seriene. Videre, så ble det funnet at stereotypien av den feminine homofile mannen er representert i begge medietekstene, hvilket forslår at denne stereotypien overlever forskjellig tid, samfunn og kulturer.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introducing the topic

Television represents its varying characters in a vastly spectrum of hugely known stereotypes. Without them one could claim that the narrative structure of, say, a fictional universe such as a TV show would have to be much more complicated, unnecessarily trying to explain to the viewer the diversity of the characters in terms of sexuality, gender or ethnicity. It is argued that stereotypes help in telling a story without much detail so that the narrative avoids losing its interest. A stereotype immediately gets the viewer to understand the character without too much detail. However, stereotypes are also claimed to be based on prejudice. In other words, stereotyping ignores the complex nature of a human being in terms of varying and unique characteristics and behaviour. Consequently, this may lead to prejudice (Chung, 2007).

Walter Lippman (1922, quoted in McRae, Stangor, and Hewstone, 1996: pp.96) said, “stereotypes are considered to be the ‘pictures in the head’ of individuals looking out into the social world”. He coined the term stereotypes, and emphasised how we have presumptions about different people, putting them in different categories, such as homosexuals or African-Americans. Richard Dyer (2002) further argues that stereotypes have the effect of making something invisible into visible, and that stereotypes are a category that sought to explain a type of people.

This thesis’ objective is to research on how stereotypes of gay men are portrayed in television, and how heteronormativity is dominating this industry. To understand representations of gay men, it is required that we take a look into the history of representations in television, especially in terms of gender. Early research on portrayals of gender in television claims to be a result of the second-wave feminism in the 1970’s, which focused on representations of femininity, with images of female characters in different programmes as well. But the question that then arises, is the relevance femininity has to do with representation of gay men. To illustrate, feminine characters cannot be analysed without its binary opposition, namely, the masculine. Therefore masculine representations are important in understanding the representation of gay men. Both gender binaries are claimed to be socially constructed according to television gender studies. The representation of masculinity was also constructed

in an inhibited way in terms of its traditional use. This is what leads us to the central theory of this thesis, namely queer theory (D'acci, 2004).

Julie D'acci (2004: p.379) says that “soon, writing on what some refer to as non-normative sexualities, and some call queerness, including gayness, lesbianism, bisexuality, and transgenderism, followed the initial research on femininity and television”. She argues that queer scholarly research in television is inextricably linked to feminist and gender studies, in the same way as the study on masculinity is. This is due to the focus on sexuality, but also because of how both queers and feminists both share the same faith, namely discrimination and repression. They are both understood as minorities due to this fact, and therefore share the same goal, the want to change the patriarchy in society and equality between all groups.

Reasons for subject selection

Stereotypes are an important issue to be raised because they exist everywhere in society, through media, institutions, and in our daily language. Prejudice against social groups like blacks, women, or gays, is reinforced through stereotypes. But where do they come from? Why do we have them? What are they? And how do they affect us? These questions came to me when watching the British television series *Queer as Folk* (1999-2000). I recently purchased the DVD collection box set because I remembered it some years back when it was screened on NRK2. However, that was a time when I was just coming out and was more thrilled and excited by this new explicit gay material (this was 1997) than I am now.

Watching it over again through more mature and experienced eyes, though, I started to contemplate about how these characters really were portrayed. Why did gay characters so many times have to be portrayed as an effeminate man with a high-pitched voice, limp wrists, and a silly behaviour reminding of a clown? I started to raise critical questions about the seriousness of the gay characters portrayed in the show. Did they really represent a realistic feature of gay men? This interested me more and more and therefore I decided to take this to another level, researching stereotypes in television and analysing the show to see if my assumptions were right.

However, I started to realise that to establish my point even further, I needed something to compare it against, most preferably a television show that seemed more neutral and fair in portraying gay male characters. This is when the idea of considering the very loved American television series *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005) came to me. It is my favourite television series of all times, and an opportunity to really go deep into the show and analyse it for my thesis was something I could not afford to miss. I understood the show to be fairer/realistic in portraying gay characters, in other words, not really focusing too much on being gay, but rather on other day-to-day issues. Therefore, I decided to use this series as an opposite of *Queer as Folk* in order to give an even better perspective that seemed more diverse and aspiring for the thesis. Still, to give it even more depth, I decided to apply queer theory to the analysis because it raises issues about the relationship between heterosexuality and homosexuality, and also discusses identities as being constructed and therefore a matter of choice. I feel that this theory could spice up the thesis a bit and give it an even wider perspective, that of identities, sexuality, and gender. The queer perspective is, thus, important and innovative for the analysis because of the connection between gender and sexuality. Additionally, it felt impossible not to include theories of masculinities when thinking in terms of gender, and decided to include this as well. The topic for the thesis came into effect; stereotypes, queer theory, and masculinities are the background supporting the analysis. More specific details on the structure of the thesis are discussed later.

The analytical objects

Six Feet Under

”A darkly comic look at members of a dysfunctional L.A. family that runs a funeral business.”

(www.hbo.com/sixfeetunder)

These words, taken from the website of HBO have cleverly formed what is the entire plot of *Six Feet Under*. The critically acclaimed and touching story about the Fisher family lasted for five years, and helped bringing quality and sophistication back into television according to many TV-critics. Alan Ball who wrote the powerful *American Beauty* (1999) created this prime time melodrama. The series introduces the viewers to several characters, each with their own issues. The gay David Fisher runs the family business after his father dies during the first

episode. The theme is always death in every episode and starts with someone dying. David's brother Nate comes home for Christmas from Seattle and soon starts to realise that his family needs him when his father is accidentally killed in a car crash. This is where the story starts, about two brothers running the funeral home together. David is the neat and organised one, while Nate is the rebellion who escaped. Claire, the youngest sister, in her late teens, is struggling to adapt and experiments with drugs, whereas the uptight mother Ruth tries to keep the family together. Over the five seasons we are experiencing how every character in the show evolves, with family augmentations, changing relationships, and death. The series make you think about everyday issues of life and how death and sorrow affect us. The show has made me shed tears of joy and sorrow over and over again.

The thesis focuses primarily on the characters David and Keith since they are both gay. Their relationship has its ups and downs, but still, the characters seem as normal as everyone else in general life to my opinion. That is why I wanted to use this show in my analysis to make a point about the representation of gay men concerning stereotypes because it seems to avoid them. But are they completely stripped of gay stereotypes? That is among the questions which are addressed in the textual analysis.

Queer as Folk

Manchester, England, is the location of three gay men, two around thirty years of age, and one barely fifteen. The gay scene, Canal Street, is the place where all of them meet to go out to find another one-night stand. *Queer as Folk* lasted for only ten episodes and is created by Russell T. Davies, which tells the story about young gay men who are about to get some big changes in their life. Nathan is the teenager who is out in the gay nightlife for the first time, and still has not come out to his parents. He meets the reckless Stuart, who has a new guy to sleep with every night. Stuart takes him home but is all of a sudden being called out to the hospital where his son is about to get born. He brings along Nathan and meets Vince, the best friend of Stuart, who has a crush on Stuart without really knowing it. Nathan falls in love with Stuart who cannot care less. However, Nathan is persistent and will not go away, always following them around. This is how he becomes friends with Stuart and Vince, and is introduced to the gay sub-culture. We are presented with several sexual encounters, drug use, disco music, and comedic gay characterisations. This light, humorous, and wild story about the gay night scene in Manchester, also presents us with the ordinary (or unordinary) life that surrounds the three characters, among others, Vince's crazy mother and gay uncle who often

comes along at the gay clubs, and Nathan's mother who tries to understand her son, along with colleagues and friends. The story about these gay characters represented a new tendency in British television at the end of the nineties with gay references never seen before. It was screened by the commercial public service broadcaster Channel 4, and brought controversy and debate to the UK because of the explicit gay material.

On the one hand, the series has probably provided the viewers with an insight into the gay lifestyle, and even helped others to come out of the closet because of the explicit gay material. However, on the other hand, perhaps the show plays on stereotypes based on prejudice? To what degree are promiscuity, orgies, drug use, drag queens, and effeminate males representing realistic and diverse features of gay men? As mentioned, the series made me realise that perhaps it even brought forward prejudice against gay men because of the behaviour being portrayed through these characters. The scenes are thus a relevant case to analyse in order to examine gay stereotypes in contemporary television.

Previous research on representations of gay men

There are empirical studies on representations of gay men in television, and the effect of stereotyping, however the material is limited. Perhaps this is a subject that has been deliberately ignored in academia? The Norwegian gender researcher Jørgen Lorentzen (2006) argues that there is a hegemonic masculinity, which has the dominating position in society over other subordinate masculinities. Of these subordinate masculinities is the gay man in western European culture. He further claims that gay references have been increasing in the media over the last decades, especially in popular culture where the representations are often being glamorised. Still, gender stereotypical representations, of men and women, are not difficult to find he argue.

Kylo-Patrick R. Hart (2003: p. 273) has studied the representation of gay men in American television, and argues that gay images suffers a "symbolic annihilation" which is an under-representation of social groups, such as gay men. These subordinate groups are at the bottom of the power hierarchy, and therefore remain invisible. He further says that, American television audiences was first introduced to gay men and their lifestyle in 1967 through the

documentary *The homosexuals* on CBS where they interviewed men such as a truck driver, a rodeo rider, and a transvestite. The documentary portrayed the gay men as problem filled, shameful, and promiscuous, who are not able to be in a stable relationship. The stereotypes were as apparent as they could be. The article also argues that stereotypes became commonplace in talk shows and drama series with insulting words like “pansy”, “fairy”, or “fag”.

Hart (2003) has further conducted a textual analysis on the television shows *Melrose Place* (1992-1999), *Beverly Hills 90210* (1990-2000), *Party of five* (1994-2000), *Will & Grace* (1998-2006), and other shows on the Fox channel, and found both positive and negative images of gay men, concluding that there has been a tremendous progress over the years, but that it is still a long way to go. For instance, Hart (2003) questions why *Will & Grace* keeps portraying the character Will as completely asexual without ever kissing another man, and Jack as a flamboyant queen who ends up marrying the maid Rosario. Moreover he concludes that television needs to encompass gay lead characters, or at least recurring ones, in order to achieve an enhancement of gay male representations. However, Hart (2003) seems to only represent one network, namely Fox, what about other channels? What is more, this is obviously written before *Six Feet Under* came out, which does indeed have a gay lead character. Apparently there is a need for further research in the field, which can give an even more updated analysis of representations of gay men.

An article written by Sheng Kuan Chung (2007) also discusses *Will & Grace* in terms of prescribed stereotypes. The article argues that the characters Will and Jack obtain stereotypes perpetuated by the media. They are portrayed as attention seeking, trendy, and are obsessed with vanities such as beauty, fashion, sunbathing, and only interested in young, masculine men. In addition the article discusses how the American version of *Queer as Folk* (2000-2005), portrays the gay characters as having a lifestyle that is erotic, with high amounts of alcohol and drugs, and goes to clubs to have casual sex. This is relevant to my thesis because it aims to reveal or challenge stereotypes in the same way as in the selected material. It is interesting to see if the same stereotypes are met in the textual analysis.

Steven Capsuto (2000) has written the book *alternate channels: the uncensored story of gay and lesbian images on radio and television*. The book describes the development in representation of gays and lesbians from the 1930s until today. Capsuto (2000) reveals how gay men in the beginning were only presented as comical inputs. Their roles can remind of clowns entertaining the audience, however without ever mentioning their sexuality, and is referred to by the author as “old-fashioned, vaudevillian ‘sissy’ cliché” (p.408). The book also describes how gay men were represented as either villains or disturbed men in the narrative of television programmes during the 1970s. Further, Capsuto (2000) stresses that gay male characters have appeared as guests in sitcoms on several occasions, where they are being stereotypically portrayed as men who loves to clean and cook, are fashionable, sarcastic, and obsessed with singing show tunes. However, during the 1990s, a breakthrough of representations with positive gay characters emerged through television shows such as *Dawson Creek* (1998-2003), *E.R.* (1994-), *Will & Grace*, and *My so-called life* (1994-1995), according to Steven Capsuto (2000). Though, how positive were they really? New stereotypes seem to take shape, or old ones reappear in another form. Still, the author is correct in claiming that there was a break-through of the amount of gay references during this decade.

Statement of purpose

Having all the above in mind, it is evident that perceived stereotypes of gay men have an effect on fictional representations, and are in fact present on television. The question that then arises is how television portrays gay men today, and do they meet some of the old stereotypes mentioned? Specific details of how the thesis will be approached are about to be explained in the following section.

The thesis asks how the heteronormative attitudes, as discussed in queer theory, affect the media. Like mentioned, the queer will be limited to gay men, and to keep the thesis within respectable boundaries, the material selected for the analysis will be only two television shows. Queer theory will be the overseeing framework in this thesis through applying the heterosexual matrix into the analysis of the television series *Six Feet Under* (Sfu) and *Queer as Folk* (Qaf). What they have in common is the portrayal of gay characters, albeit in two very different environments. Jane Arthurs (2004) has in her book *television and sexuality* described these programmes as using queer themes, which teaches the audience appropriate

staging of the sexualised self. She argues that television leads the audience into believing in one type of sexuality-expressing behaviour over another. Arthurs (2004) thereby supports the idea that fictional television shows often undermines representations of queer sexualities by staging them for the satisfaction of the audience. Based on the ideas of Arthurs (2004) I have thus chosen to analyse *Sfu* and *Qaf* in order to understand what she means, and to further investigate how sexuality is staged and perhaps stereotyped.

Based on the above discussion, there are several questions to be raised for understanding queer representations in the television programmes, which form the statement of purpose. More precisely, the aim of the thesis is to discuss the following three research questions:

1. What characterises the representations/portrayals of the gay characters in *Queer as folk*, and what may define the queer aesthetics?
2. What characterises the representations/portrayals of the gay characters in *Six feet under*, and what may define the queer aesthetics?
3. What are the main differences and similarities of the representations/portrayals of the gay characters in *Sfu* and *Qaf*? What might explain the differences between the two television series?

Outline of the thesis

In order to answer these questions I will apply theoretical frameworks that can support my findings. Followed by the introductory chapter is the second chapter, which will include a detailed description of the methodology in the thesis and how this worked. The method of textual analysis is explained along with other alternative methods that could have been used instead. Next, the chapter will consist of theoretical frameworks used in the thesis, namely, semiotics, mise-en-scene, stereotypes, masculinities, and queer theory. Definitions are explained and theoretical perspectives are emphasised.

In the third chapter I will start by presenting some background material on the history of stereotypes in British and American film and television, along with defining prime time television drama related to *Six feet under* and *Queer as folk*. Here a discussion on earlier gay portrayals is raised, starting from the beginning of the 20th century until today. Considering how big of a medium television is, it seemed more natural for me to narrow it down to American and British television because of the wide range of material containing gay references. The thesis could have focused on television at a more generalised level, discussing different gay stereotypes in television worldwide. However, the result would probably be considerably more superficial, only surfacing the various portrayals in different countries. Additionally, since this is a textual analysis, there are limitations to what can be analysed, specified details of particular media texts are required. A content analysis would be more appropriate if researching gay television material on a more general overall basis. Therefore, the most appropriate for my thesis is to narrow it down to television cultures I can relate, namely that of American and British. Furthermore, because this is a master thesis with certain limitations, it required that the amount of media texts being analysed, had to be restricted. This is how only two media texts came to be analysed, which also is enough to establish my intentions, to reveal gay portrayals with possible stereotypes. This introductory part of the analysis will give the thesis some in depth views, which can be seen as the backbone of the entire thesis and gives it a stronger hold, along with helping the reader to understand where this is going.

The subsequent section will make out the main part of the thesis, namely the independent work of the author, which presents the textual analysis of *Queer as folk* and *Six feet under*, which will on certain occasions be referred to as *Qaf* and *Sfu* respectively. The analysis consists of three parts, a textual analysis of *Qaf*, then of *Sfu*, lastly a comparative analysis that compare and contrast the two, where there will be a discussion of the main stereotypes in the preceding analyses is conducted. In more detail, the first two textual analyses start by introducing the media text in terms of the narrative plot and theme, followed by an analysis of the gay characters and their relations. In both texts I will discuss the queer aesthetics found, which are based on symbolic conventions, icons, and dialogue that establishes it as such. I refer to the queer aesthetics as “gay mise- en-scene” on occasions that is a term from cinematography, which discusses how everything in a scene composes the final expression in terms of props, lighting, camera angles, position of the actors and so on (Bordwell and Thompson, 2001). What this means is that something in the scene is suggested as being queer or gay, either by other characters in the narrative, or by ones own interpretations based on pre-learned knowledge and assumptions. In the following, there is a discussion about symbols, signs, and connotations of a gay iconography that results in perceptions of gay stereotypes, where in-depth analyses of scenes containing some of the smaller supporting characters are looked into. Further, the analyses discuss the queer family and the nuclear family from a queer theoretical perspective. As mentioned above, these analytical findings are then compared in a final analysis, which also look into the differing cultures where the two television shows are produced. In addition, societal and cultural differences of the UK and the United States are emphasised.

In the fourth and final chapter, all the above findings will be summarised in a concluding chapter. To start with, a discussion of the results will be raised, and in the subsequent section the theoretical implications in the textual analysis will be stressed. Lastly, the conclusion will summarise what has been done along with suggestions for future research and the limitations of this one.

Chapter 2: Methodology and theoretical frameworks

Methodology

John Fiske (quoted in Cassidy, 1989: p.42) argues that the text on the TV screen is "a potential of meanings that can be activated in a number of ways". This illustrates how we can interpret various meanings on television. One of the methods to interpret these meanings is textual analysis. This methodology is used in the thesis in order to produce meanings of what is interpreted. The empirical material is *Six feet Under* (Sfu) and *Queer as folk* (Qaf), and was selected for two purposes, analytical and comparative. By using the qualitative research technique textual analysis with a semiotic approach, the empirical material could be interpreted in order to find meanings of the narrative, characters, and theme, along with a comparison of the two programmes based on social and cultural context. Comparative textual analysis is widely used in media studies and is an interpreting method that focuses on the changes over space, and the differences between one aspect and another (Berger, 2000). The theoretical frameworks used for conducting the analysis are already explained. In this section, the focus will be on how the analysis was approached in terms of its method, and defining the method.

Textual analysis is central in feministic media research, whereby this method, when used on television, is vastly inspired by film research with elements like narrative structures, iconography, subject – and identity positions, and themes (Mühleisen, 2003). The objective of this thesis was to analyse gay stereotypes in two television programmes. Textual analysis approaches a medium as a text to reveal deeper meanings and connotations, often by applying a particular theoretical perspective (as in this case) in order to make sense. The analysis is based on subjective interpretations, though it can be put into another context in order to apply further meaning and associations. The theoretical perspective in this thesis is queer theory, stereotypes, mise-en-scene, and masculinities, which is defined in the chapter on theoretical frameworks. The textual analysis of *Six feet under* and *Queer as folk* has tried to reveal stereotypical portrayals of the gay characters, and at the same time applied queer theory to the analysis in order to answer the questions I have raised. Thus, the textual analysis has a queer theoretical approach, which seeks to find stereotypes of gay men along with deeper meanings through signs and symbols, namely semiotics, that support the queer theoretical perspective, such as heteronormativity. Hence, the method used is also a semiotic analysis which is

explained in more depth further down in the chapter on theoretical frameworks. To briefly explain, the technique of semiotics, describes how signs work in a system. Semiotics help in understanding how everything we see or read has meanings. We can therefore use semiotics when analysing in order to comprehend how these meanings are produced in media texts such as film and television (Berger, 2000). The intention was to use this approach in order to reveal signifiers, icons, and connotations that were interpreted as queer, in the narrative, dialogue, and images.

The method did work when analysing, albeit with decreasing use of its terminology after a while. The implications were that semiotics can be too focused on using the sign systems that everything would end up looking like an arithmetic formula. Therefore, it felt more natural to avoid using too much of its terminology after a while. Still, the ideas of how everything generates meanings were used. Thus, the implications of semiotics were that its application became less valid throughout, but at the same time was still present albeit less clear.

In order to answer the research questions of the thesis, the most appropriate method is a qualitative one, because the aim of the thesis is to analyse the narrative with theoretical perspectives, and not a quantitative technique, which rely on numbers, measurements, and magnitudes, such as statistics that are often used when conducting a reception study instead. The method is often accused of narrowing everything into numbers, which result in exclusion of other important matters (Berger, 2000). Techniques such as surveys that can be used in a reception study were also ignored because the best way to interpret a narrative structure is through textual analysis. Another reason I have chosen a qualitative research technique and not a quantitative one, like surveys or content analysis, is because this technique requires more resources than I behold at the time of writing and would result in a much bigger thesis than is expected. At the same time, a quantitative research technique would not really answer my questions, since the purpose of the thesis is to look into the narrative of two fictional television programmes focusing on portrayals. Arthur Asa Berger (2000) supports this when he argues that interest in the narratives of media, requires that you use qualitative techniques, also known as interpretive techniques, like semiotics. However, if my purpose had been to look into the effects of media, quantitative techniques in the form of, for instance, surveys or content analysis would be much more suitable. This would be the case if my thesis were to focus on the reception of the programmes, however this thesis is meant to be an interpretation of portrayals in the narrative of two texts. What is more, the queer theoretical perspective

would not fit into a reception study, to my opinion, because the framework could not be used to show how someone receives a message, but rather it is on an interpretative level such as textual analysis.

Selection of empirical material

For comparative purposes, the analytical objects chosen for the thesis were three episodes of each programme. In *Six feet under* the episodes 1:1, 3:7, and 5:12 were chosen in order to acquire a better chronological overview, but also because of relevance to queer theory and perceived stereotypes that will support my statement of purpose. The same is the case for *Queer as folk*, where the empirical material was episodes 1:1, 1:4, and 2:2.

In order to select the proper material for the analysis, I chose to use the first and last episode of both programmes for a chronological overview. However, for comparative purposes I chose to use the same amount of episodes for consistency, and decided to use only three of each. To find the episode between the first and last was a more difficult task. I had to look into the relevance to queer theory and also perceived stereotypical portrayals, a strategic selection for analytic purposes in order to support my purpose of the thesis. The method for conducting the analysis was to log anything that could be of relevance through own interpretations that I felt seemed important. The analytical material was watched thoroughly while making notes in a logbook. Both series were watched on DVD so that I had the opportunity to pause, fast forward or rewind while making notes.

Strategic selection of scenes

Qaf was watched several times and certain scenes were emphasized in order to support my analysis. Obviously there were scenes that got excluded in the analysis, not only because of the limitations of the thesis, but also because of relevance. Not every scene was relevant for conducting the analysis. In textual analysis there will always exist selections that include and exclude. When analysing the programme, the objective was to look for signs, connotations, and iconography, along with aesthetics that seemed queer or gay. In addition, scenes were analysed by applying queer theory in terms of heteronormativity through attitudes, perceptions, and dialogue in the series. To give an example, material in episode 1:4 were used because it portrayed heteronormative views through the dialogue and actions of the mother in her sons funeral wake. This material was my own interpretation on a deeper level of

heteronormativity but also on how being gay is seen as deviant by the mother, which thus reinforces the heteronorm as the dominant norm.

Thus, the analytic material was watched thoroughly, certain scenes were emphasised and applied to another context, such as queer theory, masculinity, and cultural and -class differences. This method of textual analysis support the idea of Jason Toynbee (2006) who claims that a text may show a present real world that exists beyond the text itself. What this means is that there are other real life elements that exist in the text (eg. a television programme), which we must interpret by looking deeper into the text itself in another context. This approach is one of two approaches, the other one stresses how a text creates identities, images, and perceptions of the world. Illustrating how texts are constructionist, they simply create beliefs about the world through representation. This is relevant for the thesis, in which tries to analyse representations in two texts by looking at identities and images that seem queer. Having said this, the method used in the thesis is in many ways a constructionist analysis. Toynbee (2006) argues that the goal of this type of analysis is to reveal how meanings and certain views come from the text. According to this constructionist approach there are endless significations known as “unlimited semiosis” (p.159).

The approach

After logging material in the *Sfu* and *Qaf*, the analytical notes were then used to create the final textual analysis. *Qaf* and *Sfu* were divided into two separate analytical assignments, both were divided into different sections that focused on different elements in the two media texts. The two textual frameworks mainly focused on the same elements, queer family, queer aesthetics, and signs, symbols and connotations of stereotypical portrayals, along with gay masculinities. Thus, the textual analysis has a queer theoretical perspective with an emphasis on stereotypes and gay masculinities. *Sfu* and *Qaf* were then compared and contrasted in a comparative analysis, which also looked at other contexts that could explain how they differed or compared. These other contexts were social and cultural.

I decided only to focus on a few characters in the analysis to answer my questions. These were the leading gay characters David and Keith in *Sfu*, but also minor characters that supported the narrative as well. In *Qaf* I chose to focus on four characters, the leading characters Stuart, Vince, and Nathan, along with the minor supporting character Alexander. In addition, the thesis has analysed other characters' reaction or perception of the gay characters in order to support my findings.

The theory of mise-en-scene was used, and indeed worked when conducting the analysis. Since it is really in many respects a synonym for aesthetics, it was easy to use when analysing these. Mise-en-scene is a term taken from the study of film, but is still valid in television studies because film is the predecessor. In fact television studies grew out of the study of film. Mise-en-scene was therefore relevant to use when analysing the television programmes in terms of the aesthetics that were interpreted. The mise-en-scene is explained more in-depth when discussing theoretical frameworks below.

Literature review

The thesis aims to find stereotypes of gay men in the *Sfu* and *Qaf*, therefore I have read and found research on perceived gay stereotypes in film and television through history in order to acquire scholarly background material to support the analysis. In addition, the theoretical frameworks are queer theory, masculinity, mise-en-scene, and semiotics. Therefore, I have researched on these topics as well. These will together form the basis structure of the entire thesis and clarify how gay or queer images in popular culture are put together in different ways and perhaps projecting the various identities of gay men in society.

Semiotics

Semiotics is the study of signs, and how these work to invoke a meaning. In other words, signs work together and create different significations, in which give room for interpretation and associations. Charles Pierce (1839-1914) (in Gripsrud, 2006) invented the term semiotics and claimed that everything around us are signs. At least everything in which stands for something else in one way or the other is a sign. For instance, a road sign, showing a man walking, stands for a crossover point. We know this because of the symbol of a man walking, and symbol is based on conventions that we possess. Semiotics, then, is a theory of knowledge and perception of the world we live in and is also a theory of communication which rely on contexts and pragmatics (Gripsrud, 2006).

According to Pierce (1986:pp.5):

The sign, or representamen, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a developed sign.

In other words, a sign means something else through a process of associations and interpretations. That is, the sign, which is created out of this process, is called the “interpretant” (ibid). This terminology is very central in Pierce’s (1986) theory and can be defined as meaning, or more correctly in semiotic terms, a signification, which a sign has for a person. To illustrate, the interpretant may be perceived as a measure of the extent a sign has for someone. A sign can mean, more or less, but the degree of meaning it has may vary. However, all signs contain meaning and, hence are an interpretant. Moreover, the sign, like mentioned above, stands for something else. But what this is may be referred to as the object. Thus we have an interpretant and an object in which rely on each other to create the semiotic analysis (Gripsrud, 2006).

Pierce (1986) divided the system of signs into three categories, icon, index, and symbol. The icon is a sign that are similar to what it stands for. This could be photographs, sculptures and so on. To illustrate further, a character in a television show is simply an icon of its own for the person we see before us. The only method in communicating an idea is through the use of the icon according to Pierce (1986). Index is based on cause and effect and depends on the object by being affected by it. For instance, an index can be the water you hear running from a tap. Hence, the tap is the cause, and the running water is the effect. Lastly, a symbol stands for something else based on conventions such as previous knowledge or associations that we have learned, which are completely arbitrary. These symbols can only give a certain meaning through learned codes that we possess. For example, a religious motive like the cross symbolises Christianity and Jesus Christ's crucifying. However, we can only interpret these symbols from our knowledge about the cross that is learned beforehand (Pierce, 1986, Gripsrud, 2006, Berger, 2000).

Moving on, semiotics is even more diverse. Pierce may be the one who coined the term, but certainly not the only one developing the methodology. Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) (in Gripsrud, 2006), a Swiss linguist, came up with his own ideas and referred to the study of signs and its systems as *semiology*. He claimed that a sign consisted of two parts, signifier and signified. The former is what makes up the sign like a sound, shape, or a physical unit. These signs will give associations to an idea or impulse, which is the signified. Contrasting with Pierce who saw this as the interpretant. Moreover, while Pierce (1986) interpreted everything as a sign, Saussure (in Gripsrud, 2006) was more concerned about language and sound. Not surprisingly, considering the fact that he was a linguist.

Arthur Asa Berger (2000: pp.37) says that "for Saussure, the important about signs is that they are made up of sounds and images", referring to the signifiers. Berger (2000) further explains how these sounds and images create a concept in the mind of the person perceiving them, which then is defined as the signified. Thus, there is a process of perception, for instance a word like "car", which then develops into an idea of a car, "moving vehicle". Further, Saussure (in Gripsrud, 2006) emphasised that the relation between the signifier and the signified were arbitrary when based on convention.

Saussure (in Gripsrud, 2006) further claimed that symbols must be separated from signs, and instead be referred to as a sub-category because they are not entirely arbitrary, illustrating how semiotics are indeed very diverse and possibly hard to grasp. Thus, signs may sometimes be completely random, depending on their nature. Moreover, conventions, which he mentions, are codes that associate the signifier with the signified (Berger, 2000). This thesis will only use term *semiotics* and not *semiology*, as this is not widely used.

In Saussurian terms there are even more categories in the sign system. *Denotative* and *connotative* are two of these, where the former is about direct meaning, it is what is, immediately. In other words, all the signs a person first receives when for example seeing, hearing, or reading something, is the denotative one where there is an immediate input of the sign. Denotation is a literal meaning of something and also very describing in form (Berger, 2000).

The latter, is more complicated, it focuses on how a sign may stand for something else. Connotation is very similar to symbols; it is indirect and depends on culture in order to give meaning to the sign. That is why it is very essential in textual analysis considering its varying meanings and interpretations. Illustrating that a signifier can assert one kind of meaning for some, and another kind of meaning for others, often based on location, time and space. For this reason, culture is important in acquiring the varying meanings. For example, the Swastika is in the westernised society associated with Hitler and the holocaust, while it originally was a sacred sign from Hinduism (Gripsrud, 2006).

Having said this, the importance of connotative meanings tells us how Saussure and Pierces semiotics relies on contexts, in other words, how signs appear, and the meaning they acquire depends on the context, and in this way they also give different meanings (Gripsrud, 2006). Additionally, the codes that are mentioned earlier are reflecting these varying meanings because they are in fact information that is contextual in terms of genre, cultural discourses and so on. Thus, using semiotics in textual analysis is very diverse and gives different meanings based on the context. One of the advantages is that the aspects of the meaning-making process in different texts, which is usually very overt and happens on impulse, is in semiotics quite another. The methodology makes us review our thinking, and to consider every element of a text, and then construct new meanings (McKee, 2003).

Roland Barthes (1915- 1980) (in Gripsrud, 2006) was a central theoretician who argued how semiotics also can be applied to visual images such as television programmes, films, and advertisements. He claimed that connotation and denotation and the distinction between the two, were very essential when analysing all media texts. However, in order to analyse a text in semiotic terms, differences within the text is important. Gripsrud (2006: 21) says that, “Language is a system of differences”, meaning that one sign can only be determined by its opposing differences such as hot- cold, or white-black. Thus, a meaning is signified by its difference or opposite. To illustrate further, “the sign acquires its meaning through its relations to other signs”(Saussure, 1974, quoted in Gripsrud, 2006: p.21).

To enhance, differences like binary oppositions are essential in order to grasp the idea or meaning. However, this is not the only difference in semiotic theory, syntagm and paradigm helps to organise a set of differences. Syntagm is in semiotic terms, the order of, say, events in a text and the way they are sequenced, and determines how we understand the text. The paradigm on the other hand, can be understood as different sequences in a larger system, which only gives meaning when one of the opposing sequences are selected and placed in the syntagm. The meaning is then generated. This is an important method in analysing the narrative of a text. In the case of television or film analysis, the paradigm and syntagm are very helpful, and indeed relevant (Berger, 2000).

Thus, differences do generate meaning, though how a person creates his or her understanding of a text is vastly biased or subjective. It is claimed that a text, such as film, or literature, is interpreted in new ways again and again in an unlimited process, even by creating new interpretations of an old one. This model is called “*unlimited semiosis*” and also suggests that a sign can never have a final meaning (Gripsrud, 2006: 29).

When conducting textual analysis and semiotics, there are a number of other methods too. Intertextuality is used very often when analysing a text. The term refers to how one text use elements from another and in this way become an intertext. For instance, when a car advertisement uses a story from literature, like fairytales. By doing this the text of advertisements borrow from the texts of literature (Berger, 2000).

Mise-en-scene

It is important to understand the terminology used in the thesis throughout, and one of them is mise-en-scene. The term is originally French and means “putting into the scene” (Bordwell and Thompson, 2001: p.156). Descending from the making of theatre plays, the term is used in film theory to show how the director has control over what appears in a shot of film. What appears in a shot, or a scene for that matter, are the obvious elements such as costumes, lighting, positioning of actors and how they behave, and settings. This illustrates how mise-en-scene is what makes up the scene, or what we see in the film frame, where the director puts together the different elements, which are staged for the camera (Bordwell and Thompson, 2001).

The mise-en-scene may also be associated with aesthetics, which are the overall elements that result in an expression being produced. It deals with the technical issues like lighting, cutting, camera shots, colour, sound, music, and on a deeper level, audience reception in terms of feelings, ideas, and emotions (Berger, 2000). Thus, aesthetics could be considered a synonym for mise-en-scene, however with even more elements than the technical.

Mise-en-scene has the effect of attracting the audience by changing its elements that creates the image. In other words, if something is moved in a scene, such as a car in the background, or lights change, the receiver will be attentive to the screen. Bordwell and Thompson (2001: p.175) argue that the “mise-en-scene contains a host of purely spatial and temporal factors to guide our expectations and hence shape our viewing of the image”. This illustrates how the mise-en-scene is very essential in decoding a message, guiding the audience, and also very helpful in analysing an image.

Defining stereotypes and their effect

Oakes, Haslam, and Turner (1994) uses the term ‘social groups’ when researching stereotypes. They claim that when a person is stereotyping, he or she attributes certain traits to individuals based on their group memberships. Suggesting that stereotypes are intrinsically linked to social groups, for example the gay community. Other researchers claim that when members of a social group behave in a certain way that is perceived as stereotypic, their behaviour validates that the stereotype continues to exist. However, these behaviours may be voluntarily, but may also be involuntarily, possibly because of a subconscious act (Wilson and Gutierrez, 1995).

Richard Dyer (2002) stresses the functionality of a stereotype as something that is invisible but made visible and in this manner has acquired greater understanding. What he means, then, is that stereotypes clarify for the receiver of the message the diverse characteristics of a character, which is not apparent without the stereotype. Taking this into consideration, stereotypes may be useful, especially in television, in order to portray a character effectively.

Walter Lippman (1922, quoted in McRae, Stangor, and Hewstone, 1996: p.96) said, “stereotypes are considered to be the ‘pictures in the head’ of individuals looking out into the social world”. To illustrate, when a person perceives different people around him/her, this perception is often based on predetermined pictures that he/she has made up beforehand based on previous experience about certain social characteristics. This again is often based on prejudice about that social characteristic, which results in the stereotypical behaviour.

According to McRae, Stangor, and Hewstone (1996), within stereotypes there exist two different perspectives:

- Stereotypes are made up inside a person’s head.
- Stereotypes are considered as a facet of society, and the culture of that society share this stereotype.

Thus, stereotypes can either be, like mentioned earlier, “pictures in the head” of a person, based on predetermined assumptions about members belonging to a social group.

Additionally, stereotypes may, to large extent, be a product of society and culture. Having this in mind, it is apparent that stereotypes are important to study in the media, considering how it reflects culture and society. To enhance the idea of the two perspectives, the former, the individual perspective, rely on certain steps. When an individual is stereotyping, the process of information is essential, then the process of learning, which means that an individual is stereotyping based on pre-learned knowledge (that may be biased). Lastly, there are sources that the individual use to create the stereotype, which are indirect and necessary for the process (McRae, Stangor, and Hewstone, 1996).

Moving on to the latter perspective, which may be considered a cultural approach, focuses on society in order to understand the dynamics of stereotyping. According to this approach, society is the place where all knowledge is based, and result in stereotypes to become freely available, and information regarding social groups is shared among individuals in this culture. This suggests that society is to blame when someone is stereotyping because of the shared knowledge about social groups. Thus, where the individual approach is dependant on learning that is shared among individuals, the cultural approach illustrate how stereotypes are learned, then conveyed and adapted by indirect sources like mass media, politicians, teachers, peers and so on. In this way, the influence from society at large is evident, and information processing is determined by these sources in order to create a stereotype (McRae, Stangor, and Hewstone, 1996). In other words, these indirect sources help reinforce the stereotypes by using their own pre-learned knowledge about stereotypes which they assimilate and then proclaim on others. Television is a good example, considering its pervasive informational effect on the public.

The question that then comes to mind, is what are the consequences of stereotypes? Certainly they are often a result of prejudice, considering how gay characters have been represented in film and television. Research conducted on television in the U.S. has claimed that watching television at a high rate is linked to being in possession of strong gender stereotypes. In other words, being exposed to television frequently results in more prejudice and general beliefs that the stereotype is true. What is more, the messages the TV portrayals of men and women communicate, have also given the consequence of higher stereotypical assumptions about the gender roles (Gunter, 1995).

Consuming messages in TV, which often repeats itself, is said to give a distorted visual of the reality that we live in. The viewers end up believing in the messages conveyed, and hence make up their own reality containing stereotypes (Caweth and Alexander, 1985, in Gunter, 1995). However, like mentioned earlier, stereotypes are considered necessary in order to make the viewer grasp the diverse characteristics of a person in a short period of time. Television has its limitations concerning time schedule, thus a character needs to effectively give an overall portrayal. Still, no matter how political correct a television show tries to be, the viewers will not stop making up their own stereotypes. In addition, repeating messages in television is contributing in creating these stereotypes.

Richard Dyer (2002) researched extensively on gay stereotypes, especially men and their stigma. He also discusses social groups, by claiming that a stereotype function as a general agreement of this group in terms of pre-existing beliefs that already had risen, unaided by the stereotype. What he means is how there are certain notions of a social group, which already exists. This can be interpreted as a common consensus of the behaviour of particular social groups. On the other hand, stereotypes are considered to be the very own source of ideas about social groups. Mostly they feed on themselves through repetitive messages that we receive from all forms of communication, and thus reinforce the stereotype. For instance, television can give repetitive messages of, say, gay men, that they have limp wrists and effeminate behaviour. As an effect, audience starts believing these representations and share these stereotypical beliefs with others, which again result in the stereotypes being perpetuated.

Queer Theory

Queer theory is a result of the ongoing gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) research, and dates back to the 1980s and 1990s. The theory seeks to be more inclusive and embracing than the GLBT research by erasing the categories like gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender. Instead, queer theory wanted to start over and include *everyone* who seemed to fall out of the dominant societal pattern, namely, heteronormativity. To illustrate, certain groups felt that they could not identify with any of the categories of GLBT- movement, and in this way was excluded. To illustrate further, a person may engage in a sexual act with a person of the same sex, though not identifying him/herself as a homosexual. Having this in mind, queer theory is a movement, which rejects all existing sexual identities with dominant sex and gender expressions. In addition, queer theory seeks to understand the relationship between the heteronorm and the non-hetero-norm which is defined as queer (Rosenberg, 2002).

Heteronormativity is the dominant norm in society, which through institutions, practices, and meaning-structures acquire a belief that heterosexuality is the only natural form and way of living. It is important to emphasise that the hetero-norm is not the same as heterosexuality. The hetero-norm focuses on discourses and ideas of the heterosexual through normative behaviours defined as the “normal” or “right” way of living, for instance, the nuclear family that consists of a heterosexual couple with biological children (Eng, 2006).

In addition, the heteronormativity is so dominant and consistent in our society that we take for granted that all people are heterosexual until proven otherwise. This may be referred to as the heterosexual matrix, which queer theory is opposing, and therefore defining itself as a movement rejecting conventional categories and identities established in our society (Rosenberg, 2002).

The heterosexual matrix is the idea of Judith Butler (1990) who is among the main queer theoreticians. She illustrates how this model is based on contradictions and hierarchies of the gender, as in man/ woman. Further, she presents us with the discursive/ epistemic model, a hegemonic model made up of expectations and imaginations of the gender. This model, which is part of the idea of the heterosexual matrix, sees heterosexuality as mandatory and natural.

Butler (1990) also illustrates how queer theory is rejecting the idea of identities as something consistent and pre-determined. Instead, identities are not defined or connected to an essence, but is performed. Therefore, we all perform gender or identities and that nothing is really original, only copied as a performance.

Queer theory is said to be a feminist theory focusing on gender and sexuality, and inspired by the theoretical frameworks post-structuralism, deconstruction of binary and linguistic structures, Foucault's discourses, knowledge, and power, along with Lacanian psychoanalysis. Having this in mind, it is evident how central lingual aspects are concerning queer theory considering that language use, along with opposing structures leads to a dichotomised model of the categorisations of society (Eng, 2006). Another central aspect is how sexual identities are considered to be constructed socially, historical, and geographic. Queer theory seeks to deconstruct all identities and categorisations, which they are criticizing for being too dichotomised in terms of normative behaviours opposed to deviant ones, illustrating a separation between the two. Therefore, queer theory seeks to reject the established identities by deconstructing the gender and sex, and in this way creates a different perspective that believes in not two opposing genders and sexuality, but instead, several ones. Thus, queer theory rejects all forms of social categories and sexual identities, which is inherently indoctrinated in our daily language, and therefore as a consequence, in our acts. Further, the most central aspect of queer theory is the critique of the hetero-normative behaviour and mindset (Rosenberg, 2002).

Tiina Rosenberg (2002:p.102) claims that this dominant norm immediately labels everything that is not under its normative pattern to be deviant and therefore not normal. Additionally, she illustrates how norms do not reveal themselves unless they are broken and thereby challenged, and argues that the hetero-norm has two principles:

- Segregation of categories into “we-them”, and in this way separating deviant behaviours from the normative ones.
- Assimilate the deviant ways of living.

The former principle may be referred to as dichotomy, which is a way of thinking in two-set categories like him/her or gay/straight. The model is fundamental in the westernised society and a basic drive for the queer framework. Thus, queer theory seeks to break with this dichotomised discourse, hence deconstructing the mindset by opposing the categorisations like gay/straight, so apparent in our daily language. Moving on to the next principle, assimilate means to understand or incorporate, and in this matter refers to how the hetero-norm seeks to integrate the deviant ways of living, like the queer. Thus, the heteronorm seeks to dominate queer norm in a hegemonic matter, which again leads to suppression of the non-normative groups (Rosenberg, 2002).

Like mentioned, the queer movement differs from the GLBT-movement by including a wider spectre of minority groups. However, they do share similarities considering how both focus on gender- and sexuality research in a non-heterosexual context. They look on homo-social arenas, queer representations, cultural expressions, and language use. In this matter, the movements both share interests and goals, which focuses on change by enlightening these discourses, and thereby prevents violence and homophobia (Eng, 2006).

Queer theory is, thus, trying to eliminate all identities and categorisations and by doing this opposes the GLBT movement. It seeks to include a wider spectrum of society by embracing all the people who feel they do not fit into the conventional sex-and gender pattern. Queer theory is therefore opposing itself against the hetero-norm, which defines its very nature. Like mentioned, a norm will not exist until someone breaks with it, and that is what queer theory does. Thus, queer is everything that is not normative.

Masculinities

Analysing gay men requires definitions of masculinity, in order to understand how the perception of masculinity has been affected by gay culture. In addition, gay men and their masculinity are associated with gender studies in the same way as queer theory, and positioned in a patriarchal system with a hegemonic heterosexual masculinity in the dominant position (Connell, 2005). What, then, defines masculinity? And how is masculinity perhaps a plural concept that consists of several definitions? These questions, along with how gay men have affected the concept of masculinity will now be addressed.

Masculinity (like femininity) is not a fixed quality, but a set of gender-specific behaviours which adapt over time to changing material realities...It is a fluid category, rather than a rigid structure, socially constructed, as much as biologically determined. (McNair, 2002: p.151)

This illustrates that masculinity can be socially constructed and not consistent, but changing over time. In other words masculinity is said to be a product of its time. However, some would claim that there are certain traits that are consistent and thus recognisable. It is argued that men are expected to encompass certain behaviours and attitudes, which are considered masculine (Cruz, 2000). To this extent, masculinity has attributes that are known to be masculine. But what are they? McNair (2002) argues that if there are several masculinities, they are automatically organised into a hierarchy of dominant and subordinate masculinities, where the heterosexual one is at the top. However, he further argues that the attributes of this dominion are most likely impossible to attain, but the media and society overall continue to promote these ideals through representations of the masculine. The patriarchy seems to be reinforced, and influences how men are supposed to behave, or expected to be. Thus, a hegemonic heterosexual masculinity exists that dominates over other subordinate masculinities.

The hegemonic masculinity is a concept that stresses how one particular group of men attain a leading position within a social structure. The way they do this is by combining access to power and money on specific communication methods that help them to remain in the established dominant position. The concept illustrates how social structures such as the family, the state, education, or labour are combined with male practice (Lorentzen, 2006). The genders have been attributed specific traits in every society, with changing characteristics over time. In Western Europe and the United States, for instance, the traits have traditionally been independence, competitiveness, aggressiveness, and confidence. Whereas the feminine traits have been considered as being neat, concerning, talkative, and tactful. However, these characteristics are not perceived as pervasive anymore, as the feminine and the masculine has changed over the years. Though media still play on old stereotypical beliefs about women and men, and thus re-establish the traditional traits (Gunter, 1995).

As mentioned, masculinity is perceived as a changing construction, and some would argue that it has indeed changed from the hard, tough, and aggressive, to the “New Man” of the eighties, followed by the “New Lad” in the nineties until the 2000s, defined by McNair (2002: p.158). The “New Man” came out of an increasing trend of gay awareness in the mass media. The heterosexual style became inspired by gay culture, through gay designers such as Gaultier, Versace, and Armani, in addition to gay photographers such Ray Petrie. Masculinity was then portrayed as increasingly indefinite on magazine covers and advertisements. The heterosexual man was now supposed to be sexy, combining self-confidence with sensuality and softness, and also stylish and fashion conscious. It is argued that the “New Man” was portrayed as having vain attributes reminding of gay men and heterosexual women, but nevertheless was not considered to support feminism nor gay rights. It was acceptable for the “New Man” to be narcissistic though emotional, keeping the status as a real man. The distinction between homosexual and heterosexual masculinity became increasingly vague through the portrayal of the “New Man”, due to the gay references in his persona (McNair, 2002).

However, as a response to this “New Man”, who seemed to threaten the previous real men, the “New Lad” was born in the nineties. The emphasis was now on provoking through the love of football, girls, and drinking beer without feeling shame. Television shows like the American *The guy show* ignored political correctness, playing on irony, albeit with a disguised sexism. However, at the same time the “New Men” were still there and it is suggested that they may as well outplay the “New Lad” (McNair, 2002).

This emphasises how the masculinities have changed over time and that several ones can exist side by side. Still, having said this, it is argued that masculinity perhaps has suffered a crisis out of a response to the rise of feminism and gay liberation. This is supported by Sharon Willis (1997) who claims that:

Masculinity in crisis is really white heterosexual masculinity desperately seeking to reconstruct itself within a web of social differences, where its opposing terms include not femininity, but black masculinity and male homosexuality.

(Quoted in McNair, 2002: p.160)

This suggests how the “New Lads” really were responding to other types of masculinities of other ethnicities, races, and sexualities. In this context, it is important to stress the focus of this thesis, namely gay masculinities, and how they can be defined. According to Connell (2005), the way we understand masculinity can be based on four different elements where it varies, between cultures, over time within the same culture, through a humans lifetime, and within a culture in the same time era. This suggests how masculinity has different variables and thus different associations. The fact that there exists a hegemonic masculinity emphasises that we no longer can think in terms of just one masculinity, but several types of masculinities, such as gay masculinities. The homosexual man is an example of a subordinate type of masculinity within the patriarchy, according to Connell (2005). In addition to subordinate, he emphasises the categories, marginalisation, and the actors, with the hegemonic masculinity at the top dominating position. He further stresses that subordinate masculinities is due to discrimination, which can be institutional or religious, in the shape of violence and aggravation. Gay men are, thus, a good example since they could indeed be affected in this way. An example of the marginalised masculinity is an immigrant or a black person, whereas an actor is the one who accepts the patriarchy and play along, who can never

attribute the dominant position, but believe that he can benefit from the patriarchal system because it puts them in power over women (ibid).

However the Norwegian researcher Jørgen Lorentzen (2006) claims that Connell's theories are too universal and constant. The theoretical framework is very definite and thus easy to apply anything to its definitions, which results in other categories to be excluded or ignored. The framework seems too black and white, with no grey areas in between. Lorentzen (2006) further argues that Connell's model seems to forget other attributes of men such as the emotional and bodily, in addition to ignore the fact that men do have the capability and want to change and therefore challenge the hegemony and its patriarchy. Connell is thus criticised for being too functional and rational when defining the masculinities.

Gay masculinity is nevertheless interpreted as subordinate within a patriarchy, but what are the characteristics of gay masculinities? The concept of masculinity changed with the arrival of gay- and feminist activists, where the traditional dominance of men and how they were expected to be was attacked and challenged (McNair, 2002). Gay men have historically enacted masculinity in different ways, such as the over-masculine stereotypes that focused on bodybuilding and sexual expertise, or the effeminate men, which threatened the traditional masculinity. Sailors, construction workers, and soldiers were, typically, examples of masculine men who were adored by the effeminate males before the Second World War. It is argued that the effeminate "Fairies" or "pansies" considered them the ideal masculine types. Thus the link between gay masculinities and gay stereotypes are hereby documented. However, these nick names of men having sex with other men, was before the term "gay" as we know it came into being during the 1930s, which from then on became the label for men having affection for other men (Nardi, 2000).

In more contemporary time, with the rise of the gay movement, and increased visibility in the 1970s, there were certain voices among this movement who criticised the effeminate man, who acts like a woman and being seen as an obstacle for equality. Gay masculinity was changing from the effeminate pansy, who was seen as a failed male, into the "hyper-masculine clone", who had an exaggerated focus on outer bodily appearances with extensive bodybuilding and tight clothes that revealed their bulging muscles. Thus, the feminine was opposed to the masculine in gay culture, where the hyper-masculine man was seen as the less sub-ordinate one (Nardi, 2000: p. 5). The disco band *The Village people* sang of macho men

and appeared as hyper-masculine clones themselves, which resulted in this stereotype to be part of the popular culture (Nardi, 2000). It is argued that the gay masculinity, which focused extensively on bodybuilding, was perpetuated in the 1980s when AIDS came along. Gay men wanted to avoid the stereotype of the gay man as a weak and thin AIDS victim, and thus tried to seem as strong, male, and sexual aggressive, hence hyper-masculine (Halkitis, 2000).

We have until now been presented with gay masculinities such as male effeminacy and the hyper-masculine. Evidently, the masculinity of the gay man may differ from that of the heterosexual man. It is argued that gay men today pertain an increasingly masculine presentation through recognizing their sexuality and masculinity, however, it is also argued that it is acquired differently from that of heterosexual men, which in these respects distinguishes them. In addition, there are incidents where heterosexual masculinity is imitated by gay men (Kleinberg, 1995). In this context, there are documentations of gay men experiencing sports. It is indicated that when gay men do sports, they perceive their masculinity as competitive, physical strong, powerful, and dominant, based on conventional assumptions of gender socialisation (Pronger, 1995). This illustrates how gay men might know how society expects masculine men to behave, and may influence them to imitate this behaviour in order to be accepted.

According to Kleinberg (1995), the heterosexual masculinity is observed by gay men, who in turn encompass the perceived behaviours such as power, dominance, and physical strength, as mentioned above. Kleinberg (1995) further emphasises how gay men perhaps have the need to adopt these attributes of heterosexual males, which again results in the effeminate gay man to be understood as stereotypical to a greater extent, and also is perceived as the passive partner when compared to the aggressive hyper-masculine man.

Evidently, masculinity is important to address when researching representations of gay men. Definitions and theories on masculinities have been discussed, along with presenting examples of gay masculinities. To conclude, masculinity is a concept of analytical nature which makes us understand improvingly what these gendered practices and its frameworks really are. More importantly, it helps us to take hold of how men are positioned within these frameworks (Lorentzen, 2006). The hegemonic masculinity is taken for granted as being heterosexual, where the subordinate masculinities are that of gay men. Thus, gay men have their own defining masculinities, such as the effeminate man or the over-masculine man.

Chapter 3: The analysis

On the history of stereotypes in film –and television fiction

Gay stereotypes have existed throughout the history of media in different forms of communications such as art, literature, photography, television, and film. When this thesis examines the process of stereotypical beliefs in television, it is important to include a historic perspective. To begin with, the thesis has to look on film, considering how it has been an important predecessor for television fiction. It is therefore important to mention the film history because it started much earlier. Besides, through literature research I found that considerably more scholarly research on gay stereotypes has been conducted in film history than in television. As early as the 1920s, stereotypes of gay men were present in film fiction. The “pansy” was seen as one, which portrayed the gay man as overtly feminine, working in typically women occupations such as a hairdresser or a flower decorator. There are others too, like the “sissy”, “mary”, “queen”, sister-boy”, and “nancy”. What they all have in common are how the effeminate encapsulates the homosexual man (Benshoff and Griffin, 2006).

Although, according to Colin Spencer (1995), gay men had purposely played on these stereotypes. For instance, through acting feminine to such a large extent that it became a parody, and in this way made people laugh but also averted the aggression from homophobic people.

Moreover, homosexuals are not the only minority struggling with a distorted portrayal in film and television. Women too, have been dealing with issues of misrepresentations in the media for a long time. They have suffered repression and discrimination in the same way and may therefore be considered a minority. Sex- and gender studies have in particular been concerned with stereotypes, as the media researcher Julie D’Acci (2004: p.376) claims:

US television in its early history, repeatedly produced representations of young, white, middle class, heterosexual, conventionally attractive, domesticated women as the norm of femininity.

Therefore, the depiction of women is just as unrepresentative as those of homosexuals. What about the black, lesbian, or working-class women? It seems like they have suffered a misrepresentation in media. Television throughout history seems to stereotype minorities, it has thus affected women, people of colour, and homosexuals. Thus, all minorities have suffered stereotypical portrayals, which often has been a result of prejudice.

Gender and sexuality is evidently often a victim of stereotypical beliefs. Women have certainly been stereotyped and thus prejudiced, and still are. They may be stereotyped as a housewife, “bimbo”, or a weak, passive object. The media often portray them as a sexual object that lack strong opinions and integrity (D’Acci, 2004).

Going back to the history of gay stereotypes, in the film industry representations of gay characters were evolved into more hidden notions and significations throughout the 1930s because of the production code, which developed out of certain sources in the film industry, who believed that the medium had to be censored. Nudity, kissing, foul language, and violence were censored based upon moral puritan beliefs in America. It is claimed among historians like Benshoff and Griffin (2006) that homosexuality was totally banished from the American film for three decades. However, with the coming of the Second World War, Hollywood cinema seemed to increase its queer portrayals as “homo-social groupings became more commonplace” (Benshoff and Griffin, 2006: pp.32). The comradeship of soldiers inspired the film business to make typical “buddy” films like *Casablanca* (1943). The portrayals were not necessarily explicit, but they signalled male friendship, which often expressed a love between the two (Benshoff and Griffin, 2006).

According to Parish (1993), not only did the portrayals of gay men give an impression of a feminine and “sissy-looking” man, but also used representations such as serial killers or psychopaths. These portrayals of unstable personalities that happens to be gay, leads to the assumption by viewers that being homosexual creates anti-social behaviour, or the other way around. This is apparent in films like *Rope* (1948), *Strangers on a train* (1951), or *The detective* (1968). These controversial subjects led to public success for the films like *The fox* (1968) and *Boys in the band* (1970) (Parish, 1993). Several of these films had leading gay characters, and especially *Boys in the band* achieved cult status, and may be considered an entrepreneur of queer film.

The production code continued to erase gay themes up until the 1960s when it finally lost power and was replaced by the film industry's rating administration. The new regulatory body changed attitudes and inspired filmmakers in the late 1960s and early 1970s to make several pictures with a queer theme (Parish, 1993). To exemplify new kinds of gay stereotypes that emerged in the 1970s, the film *Cruising* (1980) is very illustrating. It contains several stereotypes of the macho gay man, who is defined as having an over-exaggerated masculinity with tight, but mannish clothes that reveal flexing muscles and sometimes a bulging crotch (Dyer, 2002).

Television fiction

Still, the medium of film is not the analytic object in this assignment, television is. The early history of television represented far less gay characters, and if they were presented the portrayals often had a negative, stereotypical view considered as deviant. Shows like *Marcus Welby, M.D* (1969), or *Hawaii five-o* (1968) are examples of this (Gould, 1973, Gross, 1991, Simms, 1981, in Shiappa, Gregg & Hewes, 2006). In general, the history of television portrayals of gay men has followed trends of the viewers' interests much more carefully than film has. Although it is evident that television has been more direct or straightforward concerning gay portrayals. Series like *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* (1976-1977), *Soap* (1977-1981), *Dynasty* (1981-1989), *Brothers* (1984-1989), and *L.A. law* (1986-1994) all had openly gay characters, albeit in a discreet manner (Parish, 1993). These characters were typically portrayed more asexual than the heterosexual characters; affection between men was never really represented. Considering how television has excluded homosexuals in the programming throughout the first four decades of its history, it is evident that the minority group has lacked an opportunity to be valued as any other social group. Even in the very recent 1980s, programmes of television seldom featured an openly gay character. However, these so-called openly gay characters show less explicit affection opposed to the heterosexual characters, almost like being asexual. To give an example of asexuality, the character Steve in *Dynasty* (1981-1989) is never really represented with a boyfriend, or show openly affection towards the same sex (Gripsrud, 1995). Another example is *Matt* in *Melrose Place* (1992-1999), who is characterised as gay, though he never has a boyfriend in the show. What seems like a paradox is that when he does show some affection towards another man, blurry effects and the end credits censors the actual kiss, whilst kissing in television series like these are usually very emphasised, though between a man and a woman (McKee, 2003).

Thus same-sex affection is created as something peculiar and deviant, living up to the heteronormativity discussed in queer theory. Still, the appearance of gay characters in television has increased from the 1990s, and possibly the portrayals of gay men, albeit with a carefully non-affectionate representation, is better than no portrayal at all. As mentioned earlier, from the 1990s, the popularity of gay-themed shows increased. Series like *ER*, *Beverly Hills 90210*, and *Melrose Place* all featured issues that referred to gay and lesbians, either in the form of a gay character starring in the show, or as a topic of a particular episode. The show *Ellen* (1994-1998) with the lesbian actress Ellen Degeneres, had an coming-out episode which resulted in an escalation of gay issues on prime-time television in 1997(Becker, 2004). Being homosexual was all of a sudden more popular and several gay-themed programmes such as *Queer eye for the straight guy* (2003-2007) and *Will & Grace*, was a result of this.

Having said this, television fiction was bolder than Hollywood film at this time in representing openly gay characters. Ellis (2000: p.102) supports this by claiming that the genres of television are much more explicit and, hence, contrast with “the reticent attitudes of the Hollywood industry”. What this means is that Hollywood with its big-budget productions and a continuing dependence on “box-office hits” is much more constrained to the needs of the producers who decide what to include or exclude. The Hollywood film industry considers issues taken out of real life stories such as AIDS, petty crime, or rape, to be a difficult task for the industry to produce. The format of real-life dramas seems vastly more applicable in a televised form (Ellis, 2000). Compared to Hollywood films, television seems more independent, considering all the channels targeting different audiences, although many of them rely on advertisers who in many manners decide what to be broadcasted in terms of their monetary power.

Still, it could be argued that all these new features of trendy gay characters simply are another stereotypical representation, only in new forms. It seems that gay stereotypes have changed into other forms of representations, nevertheless stereotypical portrayals are still present it seems. For instance, not all gay men are fashion conscious, or an interior expert. It seems to me that there is a new stereotyped image of gay men as the trendsetters of the world, who are most preferably white. One example is the *Queer eye for the straight guy* (2003-2007) where all the gay hosts are in many ways entertaining for the straight gaze with their silly behaviour and direct sarcasm (Sender, 2006). The image of gay men has changed from “superficial and sex-driven to the superficial and image-obsessed” has been perpetuated through this show (Lowry, 2003, quoted in Sender, 2006: p.133).

Marginalised groups have, historically and politically, been victims of prejudice, where stereotypes are often based. Media stereotypes, of especially gay people are a result of a trend, which according to Wenche Mühleisen (2003: pp.20) “is the consumer culture’s ability to capitalise and mainstream the subcultures and aesthetic avant-garde.” This illustrates, how stereotypes of gay people may be a product of a trend in the media to show the perceived and prejudiced belief of funny and caricaturised characters of gays in order to entertain. One example may be the show mentioned above, *Queer eye for the straight guy* (2003-2007) where the programme hosts are acting up their personalities (some would claim in a silly way) and promoting expert advice on fashion, interior, and design.

Prime time television drama: is it all soap opera?

Television has a wide spectrum of genres in the form of sitcoms, talk shows, soap operas, TV films, news, game shows and so on. Since its arrival in the 1930s, television has tried to inform, entertain, and educate the public. Britain was concerned about public service broadcasting, whereas the US became focused on commercial broadcasting. In this retrospective, it is evident how different the two are in terms of television formats. The reason for focusing on these two countries is because of the analytical objects of this thesis, *Six feet under (Sfu)* from the US, and *Queer as folk (Qaf)* from the UK. Both television shows can be defined as prime time TV series, albeit with very different time lines. *Qaf* has only ten episodes divided into two seasons, whereas *Sfu* contains as much as five seasons with 12-13 episodes each. In order to understand the television genre of the two shows, the concept of what may be defined as prime-time drama series and soap opera will now be discussed.

Through discussing the history of television we can understand how the television series came into being. The film- and television industry are both very much intertwined in terms of entertaining the audience. In America, Hollywood is the centre of both. In a historic perspective, television's arrival resulted in the decline of cinema attendance, and the movie industry soon realised that they needed to work together with television in order to evolve. The film industry supplied the television business and in this way they could help each other. The TV industry used to be centralised around New York where they produced live anthology dramas. However, it soon got replaced by the filmed fictional series, which were divided into episodes. Thus the format, series, soon became the dominant form of television (Gripsrud, 1995).

Soap opera was originally a genre in American commercial radio in the 1930s and soon got adapted into the medium of television. The reason for its name was that in between the daytime serial breaks there were commercials with products like soap. Why it is called soap opera is argued to be due to the fact that operas, just like the serials, are dramatic and include intrigue and tragedy, hence the term soap opera. Further, soaps operas are different from other programs in the manner of an "endless seriality" (Gripsrud, 1995: p.166). This illustrates that soaps have a never-ending story with characters developing throughout the serial and plenty of relationships evolving, which again leads to higher involvement among the audience. However, the development of prime-time soaps with bigger budgets, screenings only once a

week in the evenings, and shot on film, resulted in a higher quality and more diverse audience (Gripsrud, 1995). Today there are prime time dramas such as *Dexter* (2006-), *Lost* (2004-), and *True Blood* (2008-), which all appeal to different segments through the various plots. Some of these series were not even supposed to last for longer than one season, but have now lasted for several years because of high ratings. What is more, the different storylines ranging from survival at a mysterious island (*Lost*) to memoirs of a serial killer (*Dexter*) contributes to popularity among different subcultures. The Norwegian media researcher Jostein Gripsrud (1995) supports this blending of genres by claiming that technological development in terms of cable networks and video, different audience demographics, and tougher competition during the last 15 years, has indeed affected the television industry. This has occurred to an even larger extent in 2008, 13 years later than Gripsrud's (1995) *Dynasty* study. The differentiation of genre categories has been increasingly vague and blended into each other as a result, and the arrival of prime-time soap opera like *Desperate Housewives* (2004-) has been one consequence of this. The drama series may be perceived as a mixture of daytime soap opera and prime time drama that has a higher quality.

Television has many formats which all contain different narratives, either open or closed ones, or a whole range of plots rather than one distinctive one. This applies especially to serials like the soap opera. In the manner of prime-time drama series, there exists a varied plot universe containing numerous incidents and characters. The genre may remind of an inconsistent soap opera only with a higher quality and an extensive cast, along with a wider spectrum of storylines (Ellis, 2000).

Television series contrast with film in terms of the narrative structure. To illustrate, in the television industry it is important to sell advertisement space, which means that many shows have commercial breaks where advertisements can be scheduled. Having this in mind, it is obvious that the scheduling and programming of television shows have a very different narrative structure than film, considering that film does not have intervals of breaks. Hence, the length and rhythm of the narrative is affected and the entire dramaturgical structure is therefore also changed (Gripsrud, 1995). However, this may be a definition of television series in a strictly commercialised television system, what about the public service broadcasting system like BBC or PBS? The structure of their television programmes might be quite different, without commercial breaks to disturb the narrative form.

Defining *Six feet under* and *Queer as folk* as television shows

Six feet under seems to fit the definition of a prime time drama series because it is screened once a week during prime time in the evening, with a higher budget and thus higher quality. There is a character evolvment that seldom can be experienced in a film. *Queer as folk* on the other hand, can be interpreted as a mixture of a soap opera and drama series. In addition it consist of only ten episodes, which may characterise it as a miniseries in many respects. However, both seem to encompass elements of soap opera such as intrigue and tragedy. Though *Qaf* has a lower quality and less evolvment of characters than *Sfu* does. Still, *Qaf* was also aired once a week in the evenings, and the episodes lasts for 30-35 minutes, which may characterise it as a prime time drama series in the same way as *Sfu*. Further, *Queer as folk* is considered having defined characters and with a final narrative resolution in every episode. The programme is very colourful with plenty of fast paced music which applies a light, happy feeling to it. Every episode can be connected to one another and follows the same characters over a short period of time. The programme has several moments of intrigue and tragedy at the same time as its humorous, thus it may also be defined as soap opera. In comparison, *Six feet under* is definitely known as a prime time American drama series, as mentioned, it consists of five seasons, each with 12-13 episodes of 40-45 minutes length. *Sfu* seems much closer to film than *Qaf* does in terms of the aesthetics such as the filming techniques, the image filtering, quality scripts, and sound, typical of the HBO-channel dramas. American series are often faster paced with more vivid colours, and background music is used to a much higher extent. To illustrate, Paul Rixon (2006) gives us the examples of the British police genres *The Sweeney* (1975) and *The Professionals* (1977), which in comparison to the American *Starsky and Hutch* (1975) in the same genre, were far less glossy and with the same fast pace. In addition, the British productions did not reach the same high amount as the Americans did, which influenced the quality of the shows. However, even if Rixon (2006) does claim that British programmes are of a higher, sophisticated culture that does not appeal to the masses, I believe that many American programmes today (such as *Sfu*) are far better in quality and narrative because of the higher budgets and a wide range of talented script writers, with a huge domestic market which the UK may never acquire.

Art television?

Sfu and *Qaf* do have similarities in terms of the linear narrative, which regular daytime soaps lack. This genre is instead without a beginning, middle, and an end, in which make them non-linear with several narratives (Zdrenghea, 2007). In contrast, both *Six feet under* and *Queer as folk* have structural closures in every episode, however with certain open clues that the viewers then have to figure out in an upcoming episode. Therefore, they contrast with the genre daytime soap opera, but at the same time do relate because of the serial structure of having tragedy and intrigue, and sometimes ending with unanswered questions. What is more, the two shows were both screened once a week, unlike the soaps that are often showed daily. *Sfu* is seen as a drama series and can remind of art television with extensive use of symbolic meanings in the narrative (e.g. dead people talking with the characters), random daydreams of the characters that are portrayed through different scenarios, and more frequent use of soundtracks that exclude typical background noise typical for realism. Everything seems rather supernatural at times and thus post modern, which play on the idea that everything is relevant. Post modernism bends the rules of the real and can make everything seem in place. According to David Bordwell (1997: p.146) the style is “purportedly distinguished by fragmentation, nostalgia, pastiche, a dwelling on ‘surfaces’, a ‘technological sublime’ and other strategies”. Hence, *Qaf* is seen as an upgraded soap opera, whereas *Sfu* are considered a drama with a post-modern twist.

Platforms of the series

Six feet under and *Queer as folk*, which is about to get analysed further down, are not produced for strictly public service channels. The former is on the satellite or cable network Home Box Office (HBO) and is funded by subscriptions, whereas the latter is on the terrestrial Channel 4, which is partly public service broadcasting, and partly commercial (Ellis, 2000). Channel 4 has therefore commercial breaks that can be distinguished from HBO, which has no commercials. Moreover, HBO has been known to use big budgets and quality actors from the film industry in their productions, along with using narrative structure and aesthetics from films. This supports the idea that many television programmes, especially the prime-time series in the US, are now adapting increasingly to the language of film. Series like *The Sopranos* (1999-2007), *Six feet under*, *Rome* (2005-2007), and *Alias* (2001-2006) are all examples of this. Though the length of the shows is limited to around 45 minutes, which obviously affects the storylines, but gives room for much longer time perspectives and evolvement of characters. These shows are known to be popular worldwide with big budgets,

extensive use of writers, directors, and actors from the film industry that make them become closer to the big screen (Time Warner, 2008). Since HBO is funded by subscription, there are no commercial breaks, which contrasts with the British Channel 4 that is funded by advertising, but regulated by the government. The channel is one of the five terrestrial channels in the UK, and because it is controlled by the independent television commission it has certain responsibilities as a partly public service broadcaster such as education- and informative programmes. The channel was meant to be a new alternative to the other channels by focusing on minority groups and sub-cultures. Perhaps the channel was obligated to come up with a programme like *Qaf* since it is all about a minority, namely the gay community. Channel 4 is an enterprise channel and does not produce its own programmes, but use external production companies (Channel 4, 2008, Ellis, 2000). *Qaf* was produced by Red Production Company, which also has produced other gay-themed material such as the film *Beautiful thing* (1996) (Davies, 2003). The reason all this is mentioned is to understand how *Qaf* and *Sfu* have different backgrounds and therefore contrasting expressions. We can see from the above that HBO creates a different expression because of its television platform and policy than Channel 4 does. The two channels seem to have different policies on showing explicit content. HBO has several original series that contain more explicit material in terms of language, violence and sex, which could never be broadcasted on a non-subscription network. In contrast, Channel 4 has certain responsibilities as a public service broadcaster, and therefore cannot be too explicit or controversial. In this way the two series differentiate because of the terms and conditions of their broadcaster.

First analysis: *Queer as folk*

The Channel 4 series *Queer as Folk*, aired in 1999, was highly controversial with explicit scenes of homosexual acts never shown before on British television, and gave rise to a debate about homosexual representation in the media. *Queer as folk* told the story of young gay men living in Manchester, England. The gay subculture of the industrialised, working class city presents us with a high party-factor consisting of frequent drug use and high consumption of alcohol along with sparkling luminescent dance scenes, typical of the 1990's. *Queer as folk* presents us with mainly three central characters, Vince, Stuart, and Nathan, who all seem to be in different stages of life. Vince is the more serious one with a nine to five job at the administration of a supermarket, always reliable and predictable. Nathan is only fifteen and in the process of coming out of the closet. Stuart, who is the thriving force of the three, is hugely popular, works in advertisement, and has numerous sexual encounters, and never seems to get tired of clubbing and wants to stay young forever. In many ways the series is a sad love story. Stuart seems careless and only wants to get another one-night stand, and Nathan, thereby becomes the next encounter. He loves Stuart more than anything, living in an adolescent imagination of the fabulous life of Stuart Alan Jones.

The question that will be addressed in the textual analysis is how these gay male characters are portrayed, and how other characters within the narrative perceive them. Signs, symbols and connotations lead the way into interpreting how these characters and the show itself creates a meaning. Along with that, queer theory and theories on masculinities are central aspects of the analysis in terms of how the production itself is scripted to portray the life of gay men as being something peculiar, possibly stereotypical, and queer, reinforcing the idea of heterosexuality as the norm. Queer theory will be used to establish the idea of a queer family opposed to the nuclear family, a central aspect of heteronormativity. It is important to not forget the idea about stereotypes when conducting the textual analysis, considering that they are indeed an issue that will be addressed repeatedly throughout the thesis. Are these characters portrayed stereotypical? Or are they simply a realistic feature of the gay sub culture of Manchester?

I will now investigate the above questions by analysing three episodes out of the complete ten as mentioned in the chapter on methodology. The selection of the analytical objects is based on chronological order, considering the evolvement of the characters, which is why the first and last episodes were chosen. The reason for choosing episode four is based on relevance to queer theory in terms of how others in the show perceive the life of gay men, and how issues being gay is addressed more than once. All these episodes together form the basis for the textual analysis.

The establishing scene: connotation of colour

In the first episode (1:1) all the main characters are telling the story of the night Nathan appeared, at the same time as we are presented with the night scene itself. Vince is the first to tell the story that seems to be in past tense, but at the same time presented in present. He talks directly to the camera, like he is being interviewed, with a yellow background. The colour of yellow is known to symbolise jealousy (Steinbo, 2006), thus this first scene with Vince may be associated with a certain feeling or attribute of the character. As we will be presented with much jealous feelings and expressions from Vince throughout the show, it is evident that the scene contains signifiers of Vince's feelings, and thus Vince himself is the signified. Along with the colour yellow in the background, the scenes throughout the show produce connotations of jealousy. Vince is very much in love with Stuart, but is too afraid to admit his feelings for him. When Nathan shows up and starts messing around with Stuart, we are presented with the jealous feelings from Vince. This is the plot, namely that a teenage boy changes the life of two gay men in their late twenties.

In a following scene of episode 1:1, Stuart is talking directly at the camera with a light red background. Red also has its connotations. It symbolises danger, passion, sex, or even sin through cultural conventions, in which rely on pre-learned knowledge. For instance, most societies use the colour red in traffic lights when people are meant to stop. Hence, red is a warning that you have to stop (Steinbo, 2006). Stuart is a character, which is very much associated with danger of having risky sex and taking drugs throughout the narrative. He is reckless, cynical and seems not to care about hurting anyone (or is he? This image is something Stuart wants everyone to believe, but some of his actions are presenting a more empathic person). In this manner, the colour red connotes danger, warning, and sex, which present us with the very central characteristics of Stuart.

The purpose of the thesis is to find stereotypic portrayals, but it is nevertheless relevant to get the characters and the plot clarified in order to ensure context and better understanding of the analysis. Before looking into the possible stereotypic portrayals, the aesthetics of the programme will now be explored, applying queer theory.

Queer aesthetics

All the main characters are presented early in the first episode in their “natural habitat”, the gay scene of Manchester. This establishing scene signifies the gay environment by showing a neon sign of the nightclub, “Babylon” with rainbow flags on each side. Then the camera scrolls downwards and presents us with Vince and Phil walking cheerfully out amongst a crowd of people. The “mise-en-scene”, as mentioned earlier, is a concept from film theory that illustrates how the aesthetics in a scene i.e. camera angles, lighting, props, position of actors and so on, together compose an expression (Bordwell and Thompson, 2001). In the case of the established scene of in episode 1:1 of *Qaf*, the mise-en-scene may lead the viewer to think that there is a gay club because of the rainbow colours. The rainbow is a known symbol for the gay rights movement, and is today often used to identify gay-friendly places. However, the rainbow symbol could also be perceived as stereotypical because it focuses on difference rather than equality by “labelling” the club as gay, a gay icon, in other words. In addition, perhaps the knowledge about what the rainbow symbolises is by itself a signification of stereotypical beliefs? Further, in the same establishing shot, the camera continue to scroll downwards and right and presents us with a phone booth where two men are kissing. This re-establishes the presumption that the place is a gay club. At the same time you hear Vince as the narrator of the scene, simultaneously with showing the two men in the booth, this is where Vince mentions the name Stuart for the first time. Therefore, we can assume that one of the men is Stuart, which is confirmed in the next shot when a dialogue between Vince and one of the men in the booth is established. The scene, thus presents us with two main characters, which both are signified as gay because of the gay signs in the entire scene, and gay is queer opposed to the dominant heterosexuality. Hence, the aesthetics of the scene is indeed queer with its flashing rainbow colours and cheerful disco dance music in the background. Although

the disco music could also be perceived as a stereotype, one in which portrays all gay men as disco loving divas.

Nathan, the third main character is presented in the same environment in a following scene where the camera starts focusing on the road sign “Canal Street” with rainbow stickers on (the one sticker almost covers the “C”, so it may be read as anal), and continue to scroll down and right to establish the location of canal street with dancing men in tight clothes. Then we are exposed to the street underneath with people walking to the next club and we hear Vince’s narrator voice saying:

“Then he came along, the one-night stand that never went away” (Episode 1:1).

The camera simultaneously stops at a blond boy from the behind, looking over the street. He turns around and exposes his insecure face, looking left for the camera. The cheery title soundtrack in the background changes at the same time we see his face, apparently to convey the end of the introduction of all the characters. The narrative has thus efficiently presented the three main characters, who all possess different significations of persona, and the introductory scene of the first episode has now been presented.

Heteronormative attitudes in action

In episode 1:4, at the funeral wake, the narrative reveals how other characters outside the queer paradigm of Vince, Stuart, and Nathan relates to them based on prejudice. The mother of the late Phil seems to blame his death on his gay lifestyle. This is very explicit in a scene with Vince and Phil’s mother in the kitchen. She asks the question,

“If it was a woman he went home with, would he snort heroin, would he??”

The quote suggests that from a heteronormative perspective, heterosexual relations do not inhabit drug use and one-night stands. To illustrate, Phil went home with a guy, took heroin and died from an allergic reaction at the age of thirty-five. His mother implies that if he went home with a woman this would never had happened. Her statement thereby supports the hegemony that exists in society in the form of heteronormativity through social institutions and practices (Eng, 2006). It is also a stereotypical assumption and simply not true that gay

men take drugs whereas heterosexuals do not, as suggested by the mother. She reinforces the stereotype by claiming that her son only took drugs because he is gay.

How Stuart is living a queer family

Stuart is a father through an artificial insemination of his lesbian friend. Here is where the central aspect of queer theory may be applied, namely by looking at Stuart and how he is living a queer family. Already in the first episode (1:1), the narrative presents us with two lesbian characters just giving birth to a child. Stuart, Vince, and Nathan are arriving at the hospital to see Stuart's newborn son. However, we soon understand that the baby's parents are lesbian. In the hospital scene, there is a tired and sweaty looking woman in the bed holding a baby, with another woman kneeling next to her in the bed. This other woman is obviously her lover. We can interpret this by how she is positioned in the composition of the scene. She is the one sitting closest to her and stroking the baby while leaning the other hand on the mothers arm. Moreover, the establishing shot shows several women sitting around the bed, and the camera closes up on the two women and the baby, therefore reinforcing this assumption. The shot also connotes a lesbian culture and lifestyle. The scene has excluded men, some of the women have short hair with a butch body-language and clothes, which are signifiers of a lesbian lifestyle, albeit a stereotype. The image itself, with a proud mother holding a baby, surrounded by women can be interpreted as an icon of the queer family, which will be addressed further down.

Stuart is, as mentioned, the sperm donor of the child and therefore also the biological father. However, the two women are meant to be the parents looking after the baby, living together and nurturing the child. Considering all of this, queer theory may be applied to discuss the idea about the nuclear family, which is thought to be the opposite of the queer family. To enhance, the nuclear family is claimed to be part of the heterosexual matrix (Rosenberg, 2002), thus being heterosexual of nature, containing one man and a woman having a child and living together. Opposed to this idea about a strictly heterosexual family, there is the queer family, in which has a rather different pattern. For instance, the two lesbians, with Stuart being the occasionally father. A queer family could also be two gay men having a child, or a single mother raising a child of her own. The point is that everything that does not fit into the heterosexual matrix like these, are seen as queer. Taking this into consideration it is evident

that Stuart is very much indeed living a queer family. He is homosexual, single, and has no real responsibilities concerning the baby, he lives in a so-called “bachelor pad” by himself in the middle of Manchester. Hence, the representation of Stuart opposes the heterosexual matrix of queer theory, which only considers the nuclear family, taking all other family structures for granted.

Gay iconography: Symbols, signs, and connotations of a stereotype

The question that keeps coming back is what makes the portrayals of the gay men in *Queer as folk* stereotypic, and how may the portrayals of the gay characters reinforce the prejudice against homosexual men? To answer this question, there is a quote in the first episode (1:1) by the character Vince, which can be interpreted as supporting my assumptions about stereotypical representations being present in the series. To clarify, Vince establishes attitudes and expectations in their environment, namely the gay sub-culture, with a certain mentality which he emphasise by saying:

“You keep on looking, there is always some new bloke, some better bloke. Just waiting to be shagged”

This quote helps reinforce the prejudice about gay men being promiscuous and shallow, always wanting sex and avoiding stable relationships. Having this in mind, *Queer as folk* has in this way already played on stereotypic assumptions about gay men and their lifestyle through his monologue.

Moving on, the television series’ narrative tells the story of a young boy and an older man. Nathan is fifteen and therefore under the legal age of sexual conduct, while Stuart is turning thirty. He could in fact be charged for statutory rape because of their conduct. This portrayal of gay men is a stereotype based on the older gay man looking for young boys. There was a time when homosexuality was illegal and compared with animal or- child molesting (Spencer, 1995). Having this in mind, it is evident that the portrayal of an older man having sex with an underage boy is a stereotype based on prejudice with roots from the era of illegal homosexuality. The prejudice assumptions that gay men always want a younger boy is not seen as representing reality. As Angela Mason once commented in the debate programme

Right to Reply (1982-2001, quoted in Ryan, 2003), on *Queer as folk*, how it played on the “myth about older gay men seducing young boys”.

Identity crisis and class struggle

When looking at the character Vince, his portrayal may signify an insecurity that exists among young gay men struggling with their identity. To explain, Vince is portrayed as a man in his late twenties, going thirty. With a suit and tie job at the supermarket, who often speaks in film or television references (mainly *Dr. Who*, which he loves more than anything else), which make him appear rather “geeky”. Vince is always reliable and tends to be the one that always solve problems for other people. Still, he seems to hate this fact about himself, and desperately wants to be someone else. This signification is especially apparent in episode 1:4, where they just have been at Phil’s funeral, and everybody around him seems to expect that he will sort everything out. As a protest, he runs out in the street away from everything, tired of being the responsible one. This scene shows the dodgy industrial and working-class aesthetics of Manchester with grey-bricked buildings that are worn down with grey British working-class surroundings and a completely empty street. Vince on the other hand, wears a nice suit in which gives connotations of inequality through class differences. In this way, the ending scene of episode 1:4 contains plenty of signs, symbols and connotations of a class struggle and the need to be different. Vince desperately wants to be someone else, someone more exciting and at the same time is shown running away towards the horizon through the dodgy street. These images signify in many ways an emphasis on difference, that of being queer, or belonging to a class, through the contrast of industrial surroundings (*mise-en-scene*) and the smart dressed character running down the street. However, is it not a stereotype based on prejudice that gay men really want to be someone else, perhaps a heterosexual? This stereotypical belief clearly reinforces the prejudice assumption that gay men are deviant.

The scene is signifying an identity crisis through the character Vince, and also class struggle where both are, in fact, inextricably linked. To enhance, Vince is struggling with accepting who he is, a conscientious person who can always be trusted. However, he does not want to be this person anymore, tired of always picking up the mess after Stuart. Furthermore, at work Vince has problems coming out of the closet to his colleagues. Thus, he has an identity crisis because of problems of accepting who he is, both private and at work.

In addition, class and identity are societal issues that are much more pervasive in the British culture than other western European countries or, indeed, the United States. Class, in many respects, defines who you are in the UK, although it is important to stress that the stratifications are not as evident today. Still, even if an increasing part of the population are now considered middle class, there are new forms of class through that of minorities such as different ethnicities (Giddens, 2001). The question that then comes to mind, is how this portrayal may be considered stereotypical? And how is queer theory applied?

The scene in episode 1:4 of *Queer as folk* can be interpreted as symbolising escapism, Vince wants to escape from his environment and possibly become part of a different one or becoming another person. The scene thus symbolises the difficulties many gay men experience, namely identity crisis, fear of being different, and insecurity. However, the apparent thematic issue can be interpreted as another stereotype about gay men being insecure and wanting to be “normal”. The hegemonic heteronorm reappear yet again through the message that is conveyed in the show. Moreover, possibly the fact that Vince is not considered having a hegemonic masculinity because he is gay. As mentioned earlier, gay men are defined by Connel (2005) as beholding a subordinate masculinity that suffers discrimination. This supports the fact that being gay is often still considered a taboo in western society. Clearly, Vince’s reaction stresses that his queer way of life is strange and not the “normal” lifestyle (he wants to run away and be different), which again reaffirms both stereotypic assumptions about gay men being insecure (not everyone are), and a queer theoretical application, through the emphasis on the heteronorm versus the queer. The narrative and mise-en-scene together seem to, thus, emphasise an identity crisis and the desire for a new one that, perhaps, will be considered normal, hence the heteronorm is sought after. Vince wants to become normal in this sense, which also signifies how he does not accept who he is, and might be representing the known stereotype of gay men as a sad young man (Dyer, 2002).

Another interesting sign in this scene of episode 1:4 is how Stuart comes driving after him in his black jeep to try persuading him to stay. Vince ignores him and speeds up his pace. Stuart can be seen as a signifier of the queer, being different and out of the mainstream. Vince tries to run away from him, hence, he wants to escape from the queerness and possibly towards the heteronormative. As mentioned earlier, the heteronormativity is perceived as such a huge influential part of society through institutions and social practices that it is assumed normal (Eng, 2006). Still, normal also means being predictable, and this is exactly what Vince tries to avoid, nevertheless, it may be that Vince feels safe in a predictable environment, opposing the queerness of Stuart who will never be considered encompassing this attribute. However, it could also be speculated that Vince perhaps simply is struggling to adapt to the stereotypical gay subculture, and maybe he is not running away from the queer at all, but wants to be a gay person that is considered far more “normal” than his friend Stuart.

Lastly, the scene also carries signs of opposition towards Nathan, the teenager who is obsessed with Stuart, in an earlier scene of episode 1:4, is also shown running down a street, however a more fancier one with pretty houses and gardens, bearing signs of a middle class. Thus, there is a clear distinction between Vince who carries signs of a working class, and Nathan who carries signs of a middle class, and paradoxically, signs of a nuclear family through the aesthetics of his environment. Moreover, Nathan is in the beginning a threat to Vince, considering how he takes over the attention of Stuart and also falls in love with him, just like Vince. The two scenes thus, carry signifiers of a class difference, and an opposition between the two characters. Nathan seems to run away from the suburbia of nuclear families and predictability, and towards the queer (and in his eyes also more exciting) environment, whereas Vince does the opposite. Hence, the need for change is fundamental in these two scenes, and that is exactly what the queer movement tries to achieve.

“Sorry it’s compulsory”: the effeminate man

One of the supporting roles in *Queer as folk*, the character of Alexander, can be interpreted as playing on every stereotype about effeminate males. The prejudice beliefs about gay men as limp-wristed, with squeaky voice, wearing tight feminine clothes, are overtly portrayed through his character. Further, Alexander is of course a drag queen on occasions too. The stereotype is thus confirmed through the character portrayal of Alexander. In the final episode (2:2), the representation of his character, based on stereotypical prejudice, is confirmed explicitly. He wears a pink women’s robe with a towel curled around his head, as a diva just coming out of the shower. This image signifies a feminised homosexual man, meeting the typical “pansy” or “sissy” stereotype from the early film history (see chapter on stereotypes). When Vince’s mother and uncle hurries away in the car to warn Vince about Stuarts departure, Alexander runs outside and cries:

“Fly my pretties, fly”

While waving his hands extravagantly upwards, pointing towards the skies, signifying a bird flying away. This is a clear reference to early film divas, seen as gay icons, for instance Judy Garland. The stereotype of gay men having the need to do Judy Garland impersonations is thus met. He follows up by saying, “sorry, it’s compulsory”, excusing his behaviour to the neighbour. Alexander may be seen as a gay icon with his feminine clothes and towel curled around the head, which confirms his statute as a homosexual, feminised man by claiming that his behaviour is compulsory. The question that then comes into mind is why he feels this behaviour is compulsory, but also why he feels the need to excuse this behaviour. Alexander accepts that his “feminine”, extravagant behaviour is out of the ordinary when excusing himself, hence being queer. To clarify, if this behaviour was not perceived as unnatural, an excuse would not be made. This clearly illustrates how the heteronormative attitudes affect even queer attitudes from within by making it seem unnatural, even by queer people themselves.

Alexander can be interpreted as a camp stereotype with his “over-the-top” behaviour, high-pitched voice, and feminine wear. Camp means, namely, over-exaggeration in the form of transforming already known images and references from the mainstream culture into a gay identity and way of life. To illustrate further, Jacques Peretti claims that camp performers were seen as a “comic caricature of themselves”, and “cranking up the oh-missus act to an absurd degree of self-mockery”(quoted in McNair, 2002: p.132). The character Alexander meets this stereotype category in the manner of his overall behaviour. He is portrayed as a funny person who likes to let people know about his presence, being the centre of attention, and usually speaks in a way that make people laugh (are they laughing of him, or with him?). What is more, his effeminate masculinity is considered more sub-ordinate than the hyper-masculine man who is seen as dominating, aggressive, and butch, whereas the effeminate man is the passive one (Kleinberg, 1995). Taking this into consideration, the effeminate Alexander becomes stereotyped even further as passive, and subordinate of the hyper-masculine man, which then assign him the lowest status in the patriarchy and thus the gay sub-culture.

The Clown

The character Alexander is presented as a clown in many ways through the different appearances. For example in episode 1:4 when they arrive at the funeral he stands in the car, halfway out of the ceiling window, he wants to let people know that the camp performer has arrived. He is wearing a pink tight top, with black leather jacket and a womanly scarf curled around his neck, his one arm is raised towards the sky, connoting a goddess queen. This image of a guy standing in a car and pointing towards the sky, gives associations to peculiarity. Possibly the producers of *Queer as folk* wanted to make this character seem out of the ordinary, lacking normal behaviour. Nevertheless, by portraying Alexander this way, they also represent the whole queer culture as out of the ordinary because Alexander may be seen as a representative of this culture. However, again the emphasis is on “normal” behaviour versus weird (queer) behaviour. It is apparent how the heteronorm dominates and encompasses even the production of the show itself. Moreover, Alexander seems to be based on a stereotype about gay men lacking decent behaviour and seriousness, and in this way is considered the silly clown. The clown stereotype has existed since the early history of film and television, i.e. “the pansy” or “sissy”, which appeared in scenes simply to have a comedic function. They danced and sang, often in dresses and with make up, and then disappeared

again after a few minutes of entertainment, never again seen in the remaining narrative (Capsuto, 2000).

To illustrate further, in a following scene in episode 1:4 at the funeral wake, he is presented with a small lady purse around his arm and a drink in the other, while in a crowd of men who seem to laugh of what he is saying. He is babbling on about what happened the night Phil died and that it could have been him, he addresses no one, seems to be having a monologue in the middle of the crowd. This scene represents the character Alexander as an entertaining clown that jokes about everything that is serious, maybe to avoid anything grave. The figure with a lady purse, decorated with flowers, wearing tight feminine clothes, is certainly a representation of a camp character, a caricature of himself. Camp means that something is over-exaggerated in terms of aesthetics, it is argued that camp relates to the idea of parody and satire, and more importantly, linked with gender representations (Mühleisen, 2003). It may be argued that Alexander represents the most common prejudice about gay men, namely that they are feminine, camp and laughs at anything serious, making them seem shallow and vain. Considering this, it is evident that the character Alexander represents the most common stereotype linked to male homosexuality, namely the effeminate man, and it can be claimed that the character is, indeed, an iconography of gay subculture as it is perceived in the show, with emphasis on disco and dance music, sparkling colours, and drag queens. The portrayal of Alexander, reminds of something rather tragic in a sense, when considering how he is represented as the clown. The clown has always been connoting the tragic-comic in western society. In addition, the camp, as mentioned, emphasises the parody, and therefore the character could also be associated with a caricature. In this way, the character is perceived as a tragic caricature of a man, which can be referred to as an “in-between-ism”, too effeminate to be considered a man, and too masculine to be considered a woman. This gay typology is perceived as tragic and appalling because of indefinable gendering, which is one of the most common stereotypes based on stereotypes of the gay male (Dyer, 2002: p.32).

Concluding remarks

Considering all these elements in the textual analysis, *Queer as Folk* certainly reinforce stereotypes through the different portrayals of the characters, however we could ask if this is deliberate or not. Perhaps the portrayals of the characters are meant to play on the irony, by reinforcing the gay stereotypes. Still, how the audience understand and interpret these characters, ironic or not, are varied. The prejudice in society towards gay men may have been here for a long time, although it has decreased. Television shows such as this continue to prolong the stereotypic beliefs through repeated messages that influence the receivers about how gay men live their life. It is important to take a step back and consider how realistic the portrayals of Nathan, Stuart, Vince, and Alexander really are. The focus on promiscuous behaviour through one-night stands, threesomes, and infidelity, along with drug use and frequent clubbing may be representing some individuals (gay or straight), but certainly not every gay man. The effect of portraying these men like this may lead viewers into believing that every gay man is like this, and hence cannot be taken seriously, at least not in terms of stability, fidelity and maturity. *Queer as folk* seems to represent gay men as somewhat shallow and only with one goal in mind, sex and partying. The heterosexual matrix has indeed penetrated the production of the programme when these representations and messages are present. Obviously fictional television shows are not documenting real life, but they still influence perceptions of particular social groups, real or not. It is important to think critically about every representation in the media in order to avoid being lead to adopt stereotypes based on prejudice.

Second analysis: *Six feet under*

The HBO drama *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005) about a family living in a funeral home, has inspired and moved television viewers around the world. Alan Ball who wrote *American Beauty* (1999) is the mastermind behind the show, and it is apparent that his skills from film have influenced how the expression of the television series has taken shape. Never before has a television programme used film language through camera settings, lighting, and cinematography like this. *Six feet under* is indeed a different show that has paved the way to a new era of television productions. The story about the Fisher family, consisting of the mother Ruth with the two sons David and Nate along with the younger daughter Claire, living in an old family business home of undertakers, introduces us to a world of inter-relations and an existentialist expression form with extensive use of deeper symbolising notions throughout the show. *Six Feet under* consist of five seasons with twelve episodes in each.

In the textual analysis I will focus on analysing the gay characters of the show, David, Keith, and one of the supporting roles that support the queer aesthetics based on queer theory, and to reveal possible stereotypic portrayals. The material I have chosen for conducting the analysis is the pilot episode (1:1), episode seven in season three (3:7), and the final episode of the entire show (5:12). The reason for my selection strategies are first of all to achieve chronological storytelling, which is why I have chosen the first and last episode in order to acquire evolvement of plot/characters. Episode 3:7 was selected based on strategic samples for analytical purposes (to illuminate queer theory and gay stereotypes). Firstly I will start by analysing the character David and how other characters within the text perceive him, followed by an analysis of the character Keith. In the following section, queer stereotypes from episode 3:7 will be discussed; afterwards a discussion about the queer theoretical perspective in terms of the nuclear family will be addressed with a focus on David and Keith. The nuclear family are in these terms based on a heterosexual matrix that consists of a married heterosexual couple with a biological child, which will be discussed later. Lastly, gay mise-en-scene in episode 5:12 will be interpreted.

The perception of David and Keith: queering from within the text

David: the neat freak

David has a style in which define him as a conservative man, wearing dark suits with a simple one-colour tie. His hair has a classic look, albeit a little boyish. We rarely see him in anything else. The clothes are signs that assign us ideas about what kind of person he is. In other words, they are signifiers of conservatism (possibly republican), and also signify lack of openness, which defines his identity. David seldom expresses feelings in public, and if he does they are very controlled. To illustrate, during episode 1:1, David is at his fathers wake and his mother starts “losing it”, he quickly removes her from public and into a private room behind some curtains. By doing this, David shows how expressing emotions is something private and awkward, which also reveals how he thinks. Therefore, the way he reacts to other people that express feelings openly, in addition to how he dresses, together signify his identity. Thus, David is rather closed and shows few if any emotions openly, which again implies issues of being closed in the closet. It seems like he encounters some of the problematic aspects of identity, namely the search for a gay identity. As we will discover by watching *Six feet under*, David does indeed struggle with coming out of the closet during the first season.

Moreover, David seems to be quite discreet when it comes to his sexuality. He especially projects this when his secret lover Keith phones him at work while being around his brother Nate and colleague Ricardo. The scene is in episode 1:1, and presents Keith for the audience for the first time. Keith starts the conversation by suggesting a home cooked meal at his place, when David hears whom it is, he is stunned by surprise for a brief second, probably because his brother Nate and colleague Ricardo does not know about his male lover Keith or his sexuality. As a response, he eyes his brother Nate who is standing in front of him, wondering who it is. Then David replies to Keith’s answer by referring to him as a customer by saying,

“Hold just a second please”

He rushes out of the room while holding his phone close to his chest, signifying a fear of exposing the mysterious caller in the other end, almost like he believes that by holding the phone to his chest, no one will see or hear whom it is. Momentarily when he has left the room and shut the door, he speaks back in a more relaxed tone. David's reaction pattern demonstrates a discretion culture, and can be linked to the 1950s when this culture was a standard, and consisted of secret codes and hidden notions of sexual encounters between men (Spencer, 1995).

Perceiving David within the narrative

A key question in *Six feet under* is how other characters within the narrative/text perceive David. How do they understand and interpret him? This is interesting when thinking in terms of queer theory, which seeks to deconstruct identities in society and focus on the dominant heteronorm (Rosenberg, 2002). Why this is relevant will now be explained.

In episode 1:1 the mother of David, Ruth, starts talking about her husband Nathaniel (this is before she know he is dead) with David sitting at the kitchen table next to where she is standing with her back to him, she expresses a heteronormative behaviour through her dialogue:

Ruth: -I think your father is having some kind of midlife crisis.

David: -It would've made more sense to invest in re-panelling the chapel...or adding coffee bars the slumber rooms.

Ruth: -I'd much rather he buy himself a fancy new Hearse...than leaving me for another woman.

At this time David turns around, watching her in surprise or maybe of concern. She still stands with her back to him, preparing dinner.

Ruth: -Or a woman my age, for that matter.

He still looks at her in awe

Ruth: -or heaven forbid, a man, like my cousin Hannah's husband did.

This sentence makes David change direction of his eyes, upward and distant with a slight sigh, apparently contemplating. Possibly he feels hurt or that she touched a sensitive spot because he knows that he is gay, which she does not. The dialogue seems to signify that Ruth is especially appalled by the idea of her husband having an affair with another man. She exclaims, "heavens forbid" when thinking about this possibility, expressing fear of homosexual adultery. We do not know if her husband has an affair at this time, it is only a concern she expresses because he is lying about smoking (which also indirectly and accidentally kills him in a car crash) when talking to her in the phone, which again makes her suspicious about his intentions. Her fear of homosexual acts, gives us the notion of a heteronormative attitude so enacted in her nature that she does not know any better (She has probably never experienced anything else than heterosexuality, homosexuality is unknown territory for her). The heterosexual matrix, which establishes heterosexuality as the definite norm and discards any other options (e.g. homosexuality), is dominating her attitude and behaviour to such an extent that everything else besides heterosexuality seems unnatural.

It is important to stress that the above scene in which represents Ruth's core (heteronormative) values, is before David comes out of the closet. Her attitude changes to acceptance and understanding when David finally comes out to her. It seems like, from that point on, that David's sexuality is not an issue. Keith, his boyfriend, is later accepted as a member of the family and no one is appalled by the idea. This signifies how the series focus on other issues than being gay. The character David is in many respects neutralised, considering how the attention is not on his sexuality as something deviant, but rather as a natural diversity of society.

We have now been presented with how the character Ruth in *Six feet under*, to begin with, perceives David and her attitude towards homosexuality. His brother Nate understands David in a rather different way. To illustrate, in episode 1:1, Brenda asks about Nate's family while driving him to the hospital where his deceased father lies. Nate, who is very different from David in terms of values and beliefs, claims that David is:

"A control freak, just like his mother"

Considering this, it can be interpreted that Nate perceives David as controlling in such a way that it is obsessive, and also as an effeminate character resembling of a mother. Perhaps Nate, on some level, understands that David is not a typical masculine man (as perceived by heterosexual males) that reminds him of a father figure, but instead of a mother. Nate's perception represents the idea about conventional gender roles and dichotomies of categories like man/woman, mother/father, or even gay/straight that exists in society, and which is also the focus of queer theory (Eng, 2006). The fact that Nate suggests that David is a control freak is in many respects reinforcing the stereotype of gay men as neat freaks, tidying all the time and being in control of the household chores just like a mother often is in the traditional nuclear family structure.

Keith: the macho gay

Keith is often showed wearing a police uniform in episode 1:1 of *Six feet under*, which may be interpreted as a sign of authority. He has a big muscular body that signifies a macho man. To illustrate, the focus on the body and physical appearance is a sign of vanity, but also dominance. The typical body builder likes to dominate and show his power. Keith shows power in two ways then, through his uniform, and through his body image. The character is associated with the perceived stereotype of the "macho" gay man, who is interpreted as an over-exaggeration of masculinity. As Dyer (2002: p.37) claims, the macho "is far more clearly the conscious deployment of signs of masculinity". This suggests that the macho is in such a need to be masculine that it becomes exaggerated and reveals the insecurities of being unmanly. As mentioned earlier, this stereotype of as a hyper-masculine is also seen as more dominating concept of masculinity in the patriarchy (Kleinberg, 1995).

Furthermore, Keith is a gay black man, and thus represents a double stigma which both gay and black men experiences, namely hate crime. Hence, he represents two minorities, which struggle with acceptance in society. When applying Connell's (2005) patriarchy of masculinities, the black masculinity is considered to be in the marginalised stage of the power structure, hence underneath the hegemonic masculinity that is most preferably a white heterosexual. In addition, the common perceived stereotype of black men is, in fact, that they are very masculine indeed, with a big athletic body and a strong libido (Staples, 1995). The emphasis on the macho gay man is thereby reinforced through portraying the character Keith as black. Moreover, gay black men have suffered the fate of being neither completely

accepted within the black community because they are gay, nor the American gay community that consist of mostly white people because they are black. Gay black men do not have a visible gay community, therefore they have tended to go to the more visible communities, that of the dominantly white. Keith is thus suffering a double stigma mentioned because he is black and gay, and also may struggle to belong. In many respects his identity is at crisis when he removes himself from the typically Afro-American culture that often define black men in America (Cochran and Mays, 1995).

However, Keith is considerably more open compared to David, also by being political. Possibly his double stigma has made him become very self- conscious about acceptance and sought to fight for the right to express his homosexual feelings openly. The reason Keith is interpreted as political is because of what David says in episode 1:1. In the scene Keith all of a sudden attends to David's father's wake, which is not agreed upon by David. He does not like that his secret gay lover shows himself where his family is. David says to Keith, in an attempt to make him disappear that,

“This is not the time to be political”

The statement, thus, establishes that Keith tends to be political and likes to express his mind. The politics that concern Keith is not discussed, but it is most likely about gay rights, when considering that both David and Keith are gay and that the situation in the scene expresses David's concern about being revealed as gay.

Queer Brunch: Symbol, signs, and connotations of stereotypes

The textual analysis aims to identify stereotypical portrayals of gay men and also with a queer theoretical perspective. What interests me the most is that *Six feet under* does not seem to be that stereotypical in the representation of gay characters at first glance, hence the task is even harder. However, the analysis did find material, which required further investigation. Episode 3:7 include several portrayals of gay characters throughout, in a scene I will refer to as the brunch scene. It contains several gay characters from the choir David sings in, and the scene seems to reinforce several stereotypes through the narrative, from interpreting the dialogue, and the signs and connotations of the characters.

Vanity queer

David and Keith are now living together and about to go on a brunch with David's friends from the gay choir. When David discovers that Keith wears a big red casual sweater:

David: -Tell me you're not really planning on wearing that?

Keith: - What's the matter with it?

David: -What's the matter with it?? It covers up all your good big...parts.

Keith: -My good big parts?

David: -Yeah, take that thing off and go put on something better. Maybe your silver DKNY T-shirt.

Keith: - Is this brunch or a fashion show?

(Episode 3:7, *Sfu*)

David is apparently disappointed and demands that he change to a tighter shirt that will show Keith's "good parts", David wants to show his friends his muscular boyfriend. The dialogue signifies the stereotypical assumptions that gay men should wear tight clothes, and preferably fashion labels like DKNY. Further, Keith asks the rhetorical question if the brunch is a fashion show. Another illustration of how the dialogue in the scene gives meaning, signifying how gay men may have a focus on outer appearances to such an extent that it is vain and shallow, which again is a stereotypical prejudice. Not all gay men have the need to wear tight

fashion clothes and show themselves off. However, David suggests exactly this through the dialogue, he wants Keith to change into tighter and more fashionable clothes, clearly expressing a focus of the men at the brunch. However, Keith is seen as much more “straight” than David by rejecting the extreme focus on outer appearances and reacting to David’s demand. The scene represents the focus in gay subcultures on vanity and shallowness, albeit a stereotyped prejudice.

When David and Keith arrive at the infamous brunch in episode 3:7, we are presented with several supporting roles in the plot that are meant to be gay. We know this because of their more effeminate behaviour, and that they are friends of David from the gay choir. Thus the gay characters are perceived as gay because of a known stereotype of gay men, namely effeminate behaviour. To illustrate the use of the gay stereotype, the host of the brunch is presented at the very beginning of the brunch scene. He opens the door and meets David and Keith, starting with a big and loud:

“Oh my God” and “hi”,

Then he kisses David on the cheeks while making an intended kissing sound. He does not stop talking, rambling on about everything, and we can see that Keith thinks the host is peculiar by looking at this face in an awkward way. This signifies that the host is seen as different, because Keith in many ways represent a very typical man who does not meet the stereotype of gay men, hence, the host is different and weird because Keith’s “typicality” make him seem weird and his behaviour also opposes the masculine behaviour of Keith (However, like mentioned earlier, Keith possess another stereotype, that of the macho gay). The brunch scene is in addition illustrating further how Keith, as a black man, struggles to adapt in the dominantly white environment (all the men at the brunch are white). The host’s effeminacy is further portrayed when he talks in a high-pitched tone and kisses men on the cheeks rather extravagantly. Thus, the stereotype of the effeminate gay man is met through the portrayal of the host. Though, if the programme had chosen not to portray the character in such a way, based on stereotypes, we would possibly not know that he was gay. This supports the claim by Dyer (2002) who stresses that stereotypes makes something invisible become visible. On the other hand, we do know from the narrative that David sings in a gay choir, which therefore gives us the idea that the characters in this scene are gay.

The game of the leading lady

Another interesting theme that is presented in the brunch scene (episode 3:7) of *Six feet under*, is how everyone are attached a label on his or her back with a name of a famous female artist/actress, which they have to guess who is, by asking questions, the game is called the leading lady. What strikes me is why they have to be labelled as a woman artist and not a male. This supports the assumption about gay men acting like women, or wanting to be one. Thus, the stereotypes of the gay man acting like a woman (eg. “pansy”) is reinforced through this game (Benshoff and Griffin, 2006). Why is it that gay men tend to struggle with being accepted as a real man and instead become associated with a woman? It is evident that heteronormative attitudes have influenced the producers to come up with this theme in the plot, and by doing this reveals their emphasis on hegemonic dichotomies like man/ woman. Hence, queer theory is applied by establishing the dichotomies through the game, which stresses that if you are gay, you are a woman and not a man, or perhaps a third sex?

Another stereotype that is signified through the guessing game is how gay men have knowledge about famous actresses, especially divas, which they look up to or even want to become. This stereotypical prejudice is revealed when a female guest, tries to guess which leading lady she is by asking Keith questions:

Female guest: -Tell me, am I a black widow?

Keith: -I don't know.

Female guest: -Am I known for my figure or my face?

Keith: - Turn around, let me see the sticker.

She does, and the camera cuts to a close-up of the nametag saying “Gretchen Mol”. She turns back and looks at Keith expectantly. Keith is thinking hard and looks at her:

Keith: -I don't know.

She starts to lose patience now.

Female guest: -Am I an Oscar winner?

Keith: -I don't know.

Female guest: -Am I blonde?

Keith: -I don't know.

Female guest: -Are you really gay?

(Episode 3:7)

He has no idea, but she keeps asking questions. Finally when she understands that he really has no idea, she asks if he is really gay. By doing this she establishes the stereotypical assumption that gay men have to know these things. Keith does not, and that is why she half jokily doubts his sexuality because she assumes that knowledge about famous actresses is compulsory among gay men. Again there is an emphasis on stereotypical portrayals. Is it really impossible to be an ordinary gay man who does not know about a leading lady?

How David is living a nuclear family

The nuclear family, as we know it from queer theory, consists of a heterosexual man and a woman, along with their biological child. According to queer theory, the nuclear family is the very representation of heteronormativity. The heterosexual matrix that the nuclear family is part of, establishes the idea about one dominant norm, which is so pervasive in society that anything that differ from the idea about a heterosexual matrix (such as the nuclear family) is not normal and therefore queer (Rosenberg, 2002).

When David and Keith wants to move into the Fisher house in the final episode of *Six feet under*, David presents us with his dream about transforming the old wooden house into their own pleasant family home with their foster children, and a garden with white picket fences. The similarity to the ideology of the nuclear family is striking. However, the problem is that Keith and David opposes the heterosexual matrix since they are both gay. David desperately wants to live the nuclear family dream but come short once his sexuality is emphasised. What is interesting is how the show seems to play on the idea about two gay men desperately trying to live as a heterosexual couple. It seems that the narrative line itself establishes heteronormative attitudes through emphasising a desire about living in a house with children, just like a nuclear family, when representing David's dialogue. Although there is flaws, their sexuality, and the fact that they are not biological parents to Anthony and Durell (who are the

foster children). Is this desire to live as nuclear family a deeper message within the narrative structure that signifies an icon of heteronormativity?

The Norwegian researcher Wenche Mühleisen (2006) supports this idea when claiming that a normalization of sexuality, in heteronormative terms, is seen as to practice a lifestyle that is perceived as traditional, i.e. a monogamous relationship. In addition, heterosexuality becomes the leading standard, and heterosexual couple-relationships acquire top status over any other relation. This illustrates the pervasiveness of heterosexual relationships in society, and therefore also the nuclear family, where the perception of normality is presented through this relationship form. Hence, in *Six feet under* the dominant relationship form of the nuclear family is emphasised through the representation of David and Keith wanting to become “normal” by getting children and a house with a garden, living the American nuclear family dream. It seems like the show itself seeks to educate the audience about appropriate staged settings of sexuality and family formations. Possibly the series tries to be innovative, challenging, and controversial, though can they really prevent the danger of reproducing stereotypes instead of challenging them? When considering the above analytical findings by applying queer theory, the answer is no. The stereotype of gay men wanting to be normal and not really comfortable with their sexuality or life is apparent. However, concerns about the queer theoretical perspective itself can be raised.

To enhance on these concerns, queer theory can be applied when David and Keith, become responsible for raising the foster children Anthony and Durell, during the last season. They seem to bear a resemblance to the nuclear family. Still, the heteronormative nuclear family are heterosexual, thus David and Keith lack the status as a nuclear family from a queer theoretical perspective. Although queer theory tries to reject categorisations, the heteronormativity which it so enthusiastically encompasses, may result in the exact opposite because of the extreme focus on deviant structure outside this dominant norm.

Moving on, another interesting observation in the analysis is how David is the only white person in his family. His partner Keith and their foster children Anthony and Durell are all black. This does not only distinguish David from the rest, but also reminds us of the stigma that exists in society. As mentioned earlier, the character Keith suffers a double stigmatisation in terms of racial issues, but also in terms of sexuality because he is both gay and black. It is indicated in research on gay black men that they often get a white partner because of the

problems of visible black gay communities (Cochran and Mays, 1995). David and Keith's relationship thereby reinforces the perception of a gay black man having problems of finding another black man as a partner (though Keith does indeed have a black partner during the *Sfu*, but obviously it ends, and this character is not in the selected episodes of the analysis).

This being said, David is indeed trying to live a nuclear family dream which queer theory opposes. However, since David and Keith are both gay they may imitate the perceived heteronormative nuclear family, but will be determined as one. Still, *Six feet under* is very good in reminding us that it is actually possible to be gay and raise children in a stable family relationship, albeit not as a nuclear family within the heterosexual matrix. The family may be a queer one, nevertheless, with all the attributes of a nuclear family. Maybe this should be a reminder of that the dichotomies such as, black/white, or gay/straight, still influences our attitudes in society. That there exist several other matrixes with different possibilities and alternatives, such as a gay family, single parenting, or even a child having two mothers and fathers. This is what queer theory is all about, how there is a hegemonic structure, a heterosexual matrix in society, and that everyone that opposes this matrix are queer (Butler, 1990).

Gay mise-en-scene

As mentioned in the chapter on theoretical frameworks, mise-en-scene is a term in cinematography that seeks to discuss how a scene in film or television is put together by different elements such as props, colours, lighting and location (Bordwell and Thompson, 2001). When the sub heading gay mise-en-scene is used, it is to reveal all the elements within a scene that make the aesthetics seem gay/queer. The question that will be raised is what makes it gay and how. The textual analysis will now discuss gay mise-en-scene in *Six feet under*.

Richard Dyer (2002) suggests that an important signifier of queer identity is decoration and interior. The emphasis on the surroundings is very evident in *Six feet under*. The very light green colour and resemblance of the 1950s in the Fisher house are signifiers which give connotations of being trapped in the past and not wanting to move on. However, this is not a

queer identity. This house represents the family all together, especially the kitchen, but the mother Ruth is the one that is “trapped” in the 1950s by the way she dresses. Therefore, the Fisher house is a “representamen” (Pierce, 1986:pp.5) of her character. In other words, this means that the house is a signifier of Ruth, who is the signified. For instance, in every episode the kitchen is the location that is most often used. Here is where Ruth spends most of her time, either cooking or reading at the table. The walls have a light green/ grey colour. Everything resemble of the 1950’s, even the way Ruth herself dresses. The reason this kitchen is mentioned is to illustrate how it is an object of change later on, which will be explained in next section. Thus, the interior may be a sign of something else, an identity or a time. The question that then arises is what is representing the queer?

The 100% gay kitchen

In episode 5:12 of *Six feet under*, the homosexual couple David and Keith have bought the old house belonging to David’s mother Ruth. In one of the last scenes the entire Fisher family with friends are having a dinner in the refurbished house. The transformation from a worn down 1950s style, to a modern trendy one is significant. The queer aesthetics of the interior are very visible with definite, clear lines, dark or completely white, pure colours, and a trendy, modern and spacious kitchen. One factor that helps us establish the idea of a gay mise-en-scene is when one of the guests (Ruth’s friend) comments on the new kitchen:

Ruth’s friend: -I love this, this is the...

Ruth: -I think it’s beautiful, but it’s a bit intimidating.

Ruth’s friend: -It’s gay (she whispers), It’s a 100% gay kitchen.

Thus, one of the characters states that the kitchen is 100% gay. What makes her jump to this conclusion is less clear, although it is a common stereotypical assumption that all gay men have clean, tidy houses which are trendy, stylish, and with designer furniture. Nevertheless, there are obviously signs that make her conclude that the interior is gay, what these signs are, is a more difficult task. Nevertheless, David and Keith are perceived as trendsetters through the mise-en-scene, which indeed show trendy and stylish interior.

Richard Dyer (2002) has investigated this issue of attaching labels to something we perceive, in this case gay. He discusses certain types of homosexual category, by referring to how the types are based on our previous knowledge about homosexuality and heterosexuality, which

meets the demands of a system of sexualities. Further he discusses how our pre-learned knowledge of certain social patterns that these sexualities take, along with lifestyles of gay men in a sub-cultural context, make us conclude different notions about them. His research helps in understanding how Ruth's friend concludes that David and Keith's kitchen is gay. She has thus based her observations on previous knowledge about sub-cultural lifestyles of gay men, which for her are perceived as clean, tidy, with straight lines in the symmetrical interior, dark but pure colour, and trendy decoration and furniture. In this way she has defined the interior as gay, though perhaps she also bases her concluding remarks on the knowledge that David and Keith are both gay. Most likely there is a combination of assumptions, namely previous knowledge about the gay lifestyle, and the knowledge that they are in fact gay men.

Therefore, the gay *mise-en-scene* is established by one of the other characters within the text/narrative. However, the assumption that the interior is gay just because of the trendy furniture and stylish paintings on the walls is a stereotype based on assumptions, that all gay men are trendsetters that loves to tidy, and have a high spending ability because of all the designer furniture and interior.

Concluding remarks

Six feet under does indeed portray gay stereotypes to a certain extent, along with heteronormativity, when considering all the above. Still, the television programme seems to be more realistic than *Queer as folk* by showing other attributes than promiscuity and drug use, albeit even if *Six feet under* has aesthetics that are more in line of surrealism with frequent use of symbolising the minds of the characters. Considering that the focus of the programme is not all the “problems” with being gay, but rather on other family issues, the representation of at least David and Keith seems fair, attributing them realistic features of gay men. *Six feet under* seems to be trying to portray gay men fairly by showing them as caring family fathers who are able to stay in a relationship. However, a comparison between *Six feet under* and *Queer as folk* is something I will discuss in the next analysis further down.

In addition, it seems like the heteronormative attitudes have been able to influence the narrative in many ways. David and Keith’s desire to become a nuclear family is one, the other characters’ perception of them is another. From the findings in the analysis, it appears that the stereotypes still have been presented through dialogue, narrative, and mise-en-scene, though, perhaps, in a more careful way, and even sub-consciously by the writers of the show. Possibly stereotypes will never become completely erased from television and the heteronormative attitudes will always have an influence.

Third analysis: a comparative discussion

When looking into the two texts, *Six feet under* and *Queer as folk*, it has been established that stereotypes of the gay man exists in the representation of the characters. Still, there are questions that remain unanswered when looking at these texts together. Which text seems to bring forward the most stereotypical representation, why and how is this different from the other text? This leads us to ask further how they compare and contrast. Is this due to the different cultures they represent? How is the American society different from the British, and in what way does this affect the texts due to the cultural differences? Firstly, the found stereotypes of the two series will be compared followed by a comparison of the gay mise-en-scene. The next section will discuss how these findings in another context, cultural and social, after that the queer theoretical perspective will be compared in the two texts.

The macho gay, party twink, and the neat freak

When considering the two texts in terms of perceived stereotypes in the narratives, it is evident that they differ. When looking at the texts from an overall perspective, we are exposed to two completely different environments, the British club scene, and the American family neighbourhood. The latter may also be referred to as the suburb, which often are portrayed as quiet, with houses, gardens, and white picket fences, and usually an over-representation of the nuclear family in American film and television. Thus, the texts contrast in terms of the narratives, however, the objective of this analysis is, among others, to reveal which stereotypes contrast and compare. Still, by looking at the narratives, we are already being exposed to contrasting signifiers. What is more important in the analysis is to reveal which text is perceived as the most stereotypical. Consequently as a result, I will now give examples from the two texts in order to illustrate my findings.

Keith in *Six feet under*, as discussed earlier, is perceived as a “macho gay”, a stereotype that is perceived as over-exaggerating the masculinity in such a way that it almost becomes like a caricature. His character may be associated with the band *the village people*, especially when the character is represented wearing a police uniform. *The village people* was a band from the

1970s that consisted of only gay men. They played on stereotypical assumptions by performing in tight but over-masculine clothes such as leather bondage, construction worker uniform, or police uniform. They were all expressing their masculinity to such an extent that it became a parody with gay references throughout. Taking this into consideration, it is apparent how the character Keith may be associated with the police character in *The Village people*. This, on the other hand, contrasts with all the characters of *Queer as folk* who are seen as slim, non-athletic, and white who likes to party and use drugs while trying to sleep with as many men as possible. The stereotypes of the promiscuous, drug using “twink” are thereby represented, and in every way differ in every from the black macho man in *Sfu*.

The character David in *Six feet under* is represented in a very different way. I would claim that the character is not stereotypical in any way, when interpreting the icon of his character. He looks like everyone else, does not wear tight clothes that are neither too feminine nor too masculine. David has no limp wrists, high-pitched voice, nor does he seem over-masculine in such a way that it becomes a parody of the man. He is simply an ordinary person that seems to blend into to the crowd. Though it is suggested by other characters within the narrative that he is neat, tidy, with trendy furniture in his house, and a “control freak like his mother” (ref. Nate). Therefore, suggestions of perceived gay stereotypes are coming from within the narrative through the other characters. However, when reading signs of the character David, there is nothing that gives a stereotypical portrayal of a gay man in my opinion. He is simply an ordinary guy who likes to be organised and have control. On the other hand, David suggests stereotypes of the gay man himself by stressing the focus on good looks and fashion labels (ref. Brunch scene), which, by the way, may compare with the subculture presented in *Queer as folk* about vanity and shallowness. In this way we can see how the two texts, *Qaf* and *Sfu* contrast in terms of stereotypical portrayals, but on a deeper level also compare. It seems like the latter represents a much more down-to-earth portrayal of gay men that only want to live a normal life with a family. Whereby the former portrays gay men in their thirties who never seems to get tired of going out on the clubs, use drugs, and get another one-night-stand over and over again, which they can boast about the next day. Thus, *Qaf* contains several stereotypes of gay men (promiscuity, drug use, party gay), while *Sfu* tries to portray the leading gay characters as realistic as possible within everyday settings. Though it can be argued that *Sfu* is not really escaping every stereotype, neither from within the narrative, through other characters (the fashion gay, trendsetter), nor from an outside perspective, i.e. my reading of the characters (the macho gay). Nevertheless, it seems to me that *Sfu* tries to be

real in their portrayals, while *Qaf* is playing on every stereotype based on prejudice in the book, however ironic it may be.

The effeminate man

What has now been done was to look into some of the main findings of stereotypes in the two texts, and how they contrast or compare. However, the focus of the comparative analysis has until now only been on the leading characters. What about the supporting roles that have been discussed in the previous analyses? How do they contrast or compare?

The character Alexander in *Queer as folk* is an effeminate gay man that likes to be the centre of attention who speaks constantly. I concluded in the textual analysis that this was a stereotypical portrayal that emphasised limp wrists, high-pitched voice, and tight clothes. The portrayal can be compared with the one of the brunch host in *Six feet under* who also has an effeminate behaviour with limp wrists and non-stop talking. They both are seen as comedic contributions of the two shows, reminding of the silly clowns that entertain the audience in the recess of a circus show. It seems like the two characters are supposed to support the narrative in such a way that it reinforces the typical perception of gay subcultures, they are a comedic part that are there simply to entertain and who meets the prejudice that exists about gay men being silly and effeminate. These comedic contributions reminds of the “pansy” that appeared in films during the early 20th century (Benshoff and Griffin, 2006). It seems like *Qaf* contains exaggerated stereotypes, and sexuality is a central aspect by representing a focus where the gay characters go out every night to find another man and have sex. Whereas, *Sfu* has a minimal stereotypical representation by focusing on the family and the inter-relations that comes with it.

The social and cultural context

Considering the findings above, it is evident that the perceived stereotypes can both contrast and compare. However, what about the gay mise-en-scene or, in other words, the aesthetics that is analysed in both texts, and how may this be a reflection of the society where they are produced?

The gay mise-en-scene is apparently more explicit in *Queer as folk* with the rainbow flags surrounding a nightclub full of men with music that is frequently played in the gay sub-culture. The light happy feeling to it seems very gay indeed, based on pre-learned knowledge about the gay sub-culture. Whereas the gay mise-en-scene in *Six feet under* seems to be more discreet through signs in the interior of the refurbished Fisher house, which is according to one of the characters, 100 per cent gay (ref. episode 5:12). Hence, as mentioned, the signs of gay mise-en scene are suggested from within the narrative by another character, while in *Qaf* there are symbols, which we know are gay because of our pre-learned knowledge about these signs, and symbols, which are referred to as cultural conventions (Pierce, 1986). Illustrating how symbols are based on what we know from beforehand. Thus, discreetness versus openness is presented when comparing the two texts in terms of gay mise-en-scene. To clarify, *Sfu* has queer aesthetics that seem more discreet when considering the signs mentioned. In comparison, *Qaf* connote openness through the very obvious signs and symbols that are represented in the narrative. These are signs and symbols we know are gay, and thereby open, while the signs in *Sfu* were labelled gay because of another character, thereby discreet. However, it is important to stress the fact that the texts represent two very different locations. *Qaf* is mainly focused on the gay night scene of Manchester, whereas *Sfu* is in a completely different environment, that of suburban America. These two very different environments are important to address, especially in terms of cultural and societal differences.

Class struggle versus capitalism

Qaf is British and indeed very different from the American-produced *Sfu*. The British society has a long history of class struggle and still carries reminiscent signs of this. By looking at the stratifications that still exist in British society today (Giddens, 2001), it is evident that this also reflects the outcome of film- and television productions, such as *Qaf*. Class differences have already been mentioned in the textual analysis of this show in terms of the set location of episode 1:4 (industrial Manchester), though not in comparison with *Sfu*. It is important to emphasise that the American society is quite different, perhaps it is not that focused on class differences but rather on capitalism in a society that reminds of one big middle class? In fact, social class is not recognised to a large extent in American culture (Barrett, 2000). Socialism is not an American tradition and is often perceived as controlling and over-protective in their culture. Their neo-liberal economy does not make the government involve in corporations or workplaces in order to protect and obtain certain benefits such as socialism, which results in a weak working class (Kerbo, 2006). However, there are obvious class differences in the US as

well, but possibly they seem to be forgotten in the media and difficult to define? It could be argued that the American culture lack a focus on class struggle. One could speculate that this is why *Sfu* seems to portray its gay characters as more neutral than in *Qaf*, and in this context less stereotypic? The working class mise-en-scene presented in *Qaf*, are in many respects reinforcing the need of the characters to express their pride when out in the gay night scene because in the working class environment it is argued that being gay is an even bigger taboo. To enhance, working class occupations have usually been typically blue-collar labour such as construction workers, mechanics, and factory workers. These occupations are considered very masculine, consisting of men with strong physics in a heterosexual environment, which struggles to accept homosexuality (Barrett, 2000). Thus, being gay in a working class environment is even harder and may result in many gay men to be afraid of coming out, hiding their true identity. This suggests why the characters of *Qaf* are portrayed as proud as they are, being very explicit when expressing their sexuality. The need to be out of the closet and showing it for all it is worth is even greater because of the repressing working class culture. However, the pride they exclaim, results in stereotypical portrayals such as the effeminate man and the party twink. The need to be out and be proud seems to feed on the stereotypes of gay men.

Social realism versus airbrushed beauty

The social realist tradition in many British television programmes has indeed affected the appearance of these shows, which is also evident in *Qaf*. The actors look like any other person on the street, not too pretty, possibly even unattractive. This contrasts with the American tradition, which often uses actors that are meant to be “eye candy” for the audience. Mihai M. Zdrengea (2007: p.128) supports this claim by arguing that many soap operas (which these two texts relate), especially in the United States, contain characters that are “generally more attractive, seductive, glamorous, and wealthy than the typical person watching the show”. He further suggests that this is usually not the case in British serials, which focus more on the everyday character or situation, often in a working class location. Further, the looks of American actors are usually very appealing and there are seldom any unattractive persons in the show, unless this is meant to be. When comparing *Sfu* with *Qaf* this is also the case. Stuart, who is supposed to be among the more popular ones in *Qaf*, is not strikingly beautiful, nor too unattractive. He is simply an average-looking guy. To illustrate the American tradition, the US version of *Qaf* has chosen an actor to play the same role, only with a look that is considered much more appealing. This actor looks more like a model for Calvin Klein

than a serious actor. When watching American prime-time series, the pretty faces seem often over-represented. It could be speculated that American actors tend not to succeed if they do not have an appealing appearance? Obviously this is a generalisation, probably there are cases where less pretty actors do get parts, however, this is perhaps because the story requires a character with a certain kind of appearance? It seems like *Sfu* is also following the tradition of more than just the average looking actor. When comparing the two texts, it is clearly that the characters of *Sfu* seem a bit more airbrushed, opposed to the more average looking characters of *Qaf* that reminds us of a more social realist tradition.

The social realism, which is typical in British television serials, is also significant for *Qaf*, not only in terms of actors, but also in terms of the set locations and narrative form. The scenes are often set in the real “Canal Street” in Manchester, pubs, nightclubs, or home in real places, hence the production is on location. The background noise seems authentic with a lot of laughing, chatting, and sounds of people walking in the background (Bordwell and Thompson, 2001). The entire image of *Queer as folk* seems rather non-glossy, albeit colourful. This contrasts with *Six feet under*, which is a studio production and can be interpreted as post-modern (as mentioned earlier).

Politics and the gay nineties

Evidently, society may influence television. Often there are important political opinions channelled through the medium, which is the case for fictional programs too. In the case of *Qaf* and *Sfu*, the political messages are obviously about gay rights, discrimination, and freedom of speech. Still, the two texts contrast in terms of the methods used to express political views that reflect society at that time. Even if the writers of a television programme are not meant to express certain politics, they will still reflect current society. *Qaf* is made in the late nineties and therefore is reflecting the British society of that time. The 1990s was a time when gay references in film and television became more visible in Britain as well as the United States. According to McNair (2002), representations of gay material were changing in terms of both quality and quantity during the 1990s, and further speak of *Qaf* as the first “gay soap opera” in the UK (McNair, 2002: p.141). He stresses that gay iconography was more present than ever before through all kinds of media such as glam rock music videos, female artists that promoted gay culture (eg. Kylie Minogue and Madonna), and various advertisements.

Thus gay material was becoming increasingly popular and seen as the new trendy culture that appealed to the younger, white, sophisticated audience, which in fact was even amazed by these kinds of programmes. However, instead of stereotypical portrayals of effeminate queens, the new image was of “white, affluent, trendsetting, Perrier-drinking, frequent flyer using (guys), (with) a Ph.D., (and) more income to spend” (Becker, 2004: p. 397). Thus, the stereotypes were still there only in another form. Possibly the fact that *Qaf* was made in the end of the nineties, resulted in the need for expressing even more explicit gay material, and out of the ordinary behaviour that appealed to the young segment. Perhaps that is why the gay characters of this text were more explicit with their promiscuous, drug using behaviour with random group sex, opposed to *Sfu*, which seems to represent a rather different gay characterisation that focuses on other problems besides being gay. Still, *Sfu* does include the coming out process of David in season one, but is not focusing solely on this issue. It is important to stress that *Six feet under* was first produced in 2001 and until 2005, in which reflects a rather different time, that of the 2000s, another decade. Additionally, *Six feet under* is produced in another country, the United States, which encompasses a different culture than the British. Thus it could be speculated that, *Qaf* and *Sfu* may be representing two very different expressions because of the cultural differences as well as the different time perspectives.

Gay rights movement

The United States has a longer history of gay rights than the UK, starting for real with the “Stonewall riot” in 1969 where gays and lesbians attacked the police and demonstrated due to a recent police raid of a gay club (Spencer, 1995). Hence the need for expressing gay rights through the portrayal of characters in American television seem to be less than in Britain with a much shorter history of gay proclaiming. Taking this into consideration, the societies is apparently reflecting the final expression of *Six feet under* and *Queer as folk* in different ways because of the contrasting histories where they are produced. *Qaf* portrays characters that are very “out there” when considering their behaviour. Random sex in the toilet, loud attention-seeking characters, occasional dragging and so on, are all examples which illustrate this. It seems like the focus in this narrative is to a large extent on sex and pride.

In comparison, *Sfu* is more about the family and inter-relations than on being gay. The focus is different than *Qaf* in this sense, and perhaps this is because of how long gay rights have reached. In the United States there are now certain states where same-sex marriages are legalised, and several ones where same-sex couples are allowed to use surrogates to give birth to their child, and even adopt. While in Britain civil partnership law, reminding of the one that used to exist in Norway, was approved as late as in 2004 (Wikipedia, 2008, Wikipedia, 2008a). This suggests how far the United States have come compared to the UK, at least when considering same-sex marriages. The American society may seem more liberal on the surface, when watching various television shows that all try to be political correct in representing gay characters. Still, on the other hand the United States has strong family values that are seen as conservative and therefore anti-liberal, for instance the American family association (AFA) that several times has tried to ban media containing gay references. Perhaps the American society is actually not as liberal as it seems through television? It could be argued that the gay characters often portrayed in American television are okay as long as they do not express their sexuality. However, the narrative of *Sfu* is located in the state of California, which is often perceived as liberal. Perhaps that is why creator Alan Ball dared to show explicit gay sex in the series. *Six feet under* probably caused plenty of controversy throughout the United States because of this, when considering the strong conservative morals in the country. Possibly the focus in the British *Qaf* seems to be on gay proclamation due to the fact that they have a shorter history of gay rights, while in *Sfu* there was no such need to proclaim being gay, but rather on other issues? Although the conservatism has increased during the last decade, American television industry is mostly based in the more liberal states such as California and New York, and therefore does not seem to reflect the more conservative values of other states, at least in the case of *Sfu*.

Queer retrospective: who's the queerest of them all?

The queer family versus the nuclear family

It is interesting to look at the differences in terms of the queer family structure opposed to the nuclear family structure in *Queer as folk* and *Six feet under*, which may be interpreted as the queerest? As discussed in the textual analysis of *Qaf*, there are indeed a very queer family consisting of two lesbians bringing up a baby with the gay Stuart as the sperm donor. This is obviously outside the heteronormative pattern, which only considers the heterosexual nuclear family as the natural one according to queer theory. Thus, Stuart is living a very queer family indeed. In comparison with *Sfu*, where David and Keith's family consisting of two foster-children is discussed, there is also a break with the heteronormative pattern because of their sexuality and non-biological connection to their children. In many ways David is dreaming about becoming a nuclear family, but will never accomplish this because of his sexuality. When thinking from a queer perspective, to *live* a nuclear family, is emphasising how a person creates a state of being by pretending or imitating, hence living it. It is the same as when Judith Butler (1990) argues that human beings are not bound up to one particular gender, because gender is something we *do*, and not something we *are*. What she tries to say is that we decide for ourselves who we are and what gender we want to be because it is simply a question of cultural convention. Humans thus *live* a gender in the same way David *lives* a nuclear family. At least David and Keith in *Sfu* are pretending to be a normal family, living in a house together as a happy couple, whereas Stuart in *Qaf* is not even living with his son. Hence, Stuart is living the queerest family, while in contrast, David and Keith are living a nuclear family.

What also separates the two families are in terms of race. As mentioned, David is the only white person in the family, the rest are black. In *Qaf* everyone are white, and this is not only the family but almost every character too (except for the African exchange student that quickly gets deported because of Stuart), which reflects British society as less diverse than the American. Though, the UK actually has a very multicultural society, that is why the fact that every character in *Qaf* is white, may be questioned. Possibly this is because *Queer as folk* might be targeting a niche audience segment that is mainly white and young. While *Six feet*

under, on the other hand, is perhaps targeting a wider audience segment with a character gallery that is considered much broader. It could be argued that *Qaf* seems less realistic because of this.

Concluding remarks

To conclude, the findings in this comparative analysis are indicating how the two texts, *Queer as folk* and *Six feet under*, compare and contrast in many ways. The stereotypes revealed in both texts have certain similarities, but mostly differences, especially considering the extent of stereotypical portrayals. The text of *Sfu* seems to be stereotypical from within the narrative through other characters, but not as much from an outside perspective through my perception. The series is therefore perceived as less stereotypical, representing the gay characters without focusing too much on their sexuality. *Qaf* is in contrast perceived as more stereotypical when representing gay men from an outside perspective. It seems to play on several stereotypes based on prejudice about gay men being promiscuous and never wanting a monogamous relationship. I conclude from these findings that *Qaf* is reinforcing prejudice against gay men as silly caricatures of a man. Though it could be argued that the portrayals of the gay men in *Qaf* are an expression of pride too. Perhaps prejudice and pride is reinforced, depending on who watches it, a gay man may feel pride, whereas a straight man that has never met a gay person may acknowledge his prejudice beliefs through these portrayals.

Six feet under, on the other hand, might help in reinforcing acceptance of homosexuality by representing gay men with common everyday issues. Further, it is important not to forget that these two texts come from two very different countries, and that the cultural and social issues are indeed influencing them in terms of expression form. The two societies do contrast in the evolvement of gay rights, although they are different, the western world is becoming increasingly global and thus more equal. At the same time, the texts represent different decades which may explain the contrasting expressions.

Concluding chapter

Discussion of results

The focus of this thesis has been on stereotypes of gay men in *Six feet under* and *Queer as folk*. Benshoff and Griffin (2006: p.15) has argued that:

Stereotypes work to invoke a consensus of opinion and make people think they 'know' a group, when in fact what they know is only a stereotype. In actuality, most subcultural groups- especially queer ones- are highly diverse.

Their emphasis on the effects of stereotypes has been an important focus in this thesis, which enlightens how stereotypes are not representing the real truth about a particular social group, but instead representing assumptions about this social group. Stereotypes of gay men can be seen in the media everywhere, though; perhaps they are not as apparent as they used to be. Before conducting the analysis, I assumed that *Queer as folk* represented gay stereotypes to a greater extent than *Six feet under* did. In fact, I believed the latter was portraying gay men in a realistic way that was considered to be with diverse characteristics, without focusing too much on the gayness of the characters, but rather on ordinary family- and couple issues. In contrast, I assumed that *Qaf* was very stereotypical indeed with portrayals of gay men as promiscuous, silly, effeminate, and vain. But to my surprise, the analysis revealed that both television shows represented stereotypes. When *Six feet under* and *Queer as folk* was analysed by using the approach of textual analysis, the thesis aimed to answer certain questions that could reveal the gay stereotypes in the narratives.

First of all, the characteristics of gay men in *Qaf* was analysed in addition to the queer aesthetics. The clown, the effeminate man, and the promiscuous party twink, was found in the analysis. The characteristics of the gay characters have been clearly described where representations of the gay men have been analysed in terms of how pre-learned stereotypes may be met. The gay characters are represented considerably more explicit and literal in terms of gay images. In this context we could use the ideas of Richard Dyer (2002) who argues that a cultural text such as this, establishes the sexuality of the characters immediately through the use of dialogue and narrative but also as a literate perception. We instantly see which sexuality the character has through particular types. In other words, the characters in *Qaf* can

be perceived as gay momentarily by recognising types of sexuality. They expose themselves through the dialogue when speaking about men in a sexual way, but also when presented in an environment that consists of several queer aesthetics, such as rainbow flags, men kissing, and disco music. *Qaf* also presents us with the character Alexander who wears tight clothes with flashing colours and sometimes even a boa around his neck, clearly illustrating a gay effeminate queen that meets our stereotypes of gay men as being silly, effeminate, having limp wrists, with a high-pitched voice. Still, the leading characters of *Qaf* were interpreted as being rather different. Vince, for instance, seems very ordinary but reveals his gay sexuality and stereotypical assumptions through the dialogue when he speaks about the gay subculture, where the focus is to find another one-night stand. Nevertheless, I found it difficult to interpret him as a stereotypical portrayal of a gay man because he is simply not, when looking at him at first glance. Vince is not wearing tight clothes with flashing colours in the same way as Alexander does, but is dressed rather neutral, meaning, nothing explicit that attracts attention. However, it may be discussed if represents the stereotype of sad young man (Dyer, 2002) Stuart on the other hand is represented several times kissing different men and having explicit gay sex in toilets, along with taking drugs. This is clearly perpetuating the stereotype of gay men as promiscuous, vain, and careless.

Secondly, characteristics of the gay male characters in *Six feet under* was documented along with gay mise-en-scene. The textual analysis revealed that *Six feet under* did, indeed, present gay representations that are perceived as stereotypic. The effeminate man, the macho gay, the neat freak, and the trendsetter were found. The effeminate man was documented in the brunch scene (episode 3:7). Further, the stereotype of a macho gay man was found by interpreting the character Keith, with clear references to the disco group *The village people*, who had a member performing in a police uniform, just as Keith is seen wearing his. The stereotypical portrayal of the macho gay man is masculine to such an extent that it becomes a parody of the male. Furthermore, I realised that the textual analysis also revealed that the narrative and dialogue could be stereotypical when isolated from the rest (For instance when another guest in the brunch scene asks Keith if he really is gay because he cannot guess which leading lady she is supposed to be, which perpetuates the stereotype of gay men as diva admirers). There were stereotypes within the narrative to a greater extent, than that of *Queer as folk*. Unlike *Qaf*, *Sfu*, represents the effeminate characters in the brunch scene as quite normally dressed. However the one character that is analysed exposes his effeminate behaviour through the dialogue and behaviour. The concept of masculinity has also been discussed in order to apply

better understanding of how gay men may encompass their very own gay masculinities and is inextricably linked with gay stereotypes because both concepts seem to depend on representations when illustrating an argument. In addition a gay mise-en-scene was found in episode 5:12 and was described as the *100 per cent gay kitchen*. It was argued that the interior of the new refurbished Fisher house now contained trendy and stylish colours and decorations throughout, along with trendy furniture. This reinforced the stereotype of gay men as trendsetters, but also that David and Keith lived up to the stereotype of being neat freaks because everything is clean and tidy.

Thirdly, similarities and differences were found when comparing *Six feet under* and *Queer as folk*. The social and cultural context was emphasised. In addition the different times when the two television programmes were made is also stressed, where a discussion of the gay nineties is raised. The extent of how the different cultures, where class struggle is opposed to capitalism is also emphasised, along with a focus on the social realist tradition of the UK versus the glossy and airbrushed tradition of the US in terms of the selection of actors and locations. Overall, the comparative analysis tried to find similarities and differences in the portrayals of the gay characters, where the above contexts could explain these. Stereotypes represented in the two media texts were measured against each other, and the most interesting similarity found in the comparative study was that of the effeminate man. It seems like this stereotype survives everything, the effeminate man is invincible. The stereotype can be found even when crossing cultures and societies, that of the American HBO, and the British channel 4. Even the different time perspectives seem to have little effect on the stereotype of the effeminate gay man when taking into consideration that *Qaf* reflects the 1990s, while *Sfu* the 2000s. Moreover, the effeminate man has been found in previous studies of gay stereotypes going back to the early 20th century's pansy.

Moving on, the main differences that were found in *Six feet under* and *Queer as folk*, was that the latter represented a focus on promiscuity, drugs and partying in the gay subculture that could be recognised as stereotypical portrayals of a party twink at first glance. In contrast the former focused on family affairs, but still had stereotypical portrayals within the narrative when analysing how other characters perceived the gay characters. Though the macho gay man was found and could be recognised when having stereotypical representations in mind. Thus, pride in the more repressed gay working-class culture of the UK was contrasted with the more openly and liberal American suburbia, that seemed to focus on other elements than being gay. In addition, the contrasting family patterns, that of the queer family and the nuclear family was compared and contrasted. The results were that *Queer as folk* had the most queer family when including the principles of queer theory that focuses on social stratifications between gay- and heterosexual lifestyles. *Qaf* and *Sfu* have indeed helped opening up the minds of many viewers, and even helped others come out of the closet. On the other hand the portrayals of the gay characters are not representing every gay man, which of course is not possible for any media text. Though *Sfu* does seem to portray its gay characters in a more neutral way than *Qaf* does.

Theoretical implications

Queer theory was the main theoretical framework that was used when conducting the textual analysis. It can be considered the backbone of the entire thesis along with the concept of masculinity. Together they have helped in clarifying the representations of gay men in television, in this case *Six feet under* and *Queer as folk*. The queer theoretical perspective has contributed to the interpretations found in the analyses by using the ideas of heteronormativity, nuclear family, and the heterosexual matrix. When conducting the analysis these ideas were applied into the analysis of the television series and the results were quite interesting. As mentioned, the family patterns presented in the *Qaf* and *Sfu* were defined as either queer or nuclear. Where the latter consists of a heterosexual couple with a biological child, and former opposes this family structure. By applying these ideas, the heteronormative attitudes, of how the heterosexual lifestyle is taken for granted as being normal, whereas everything else is deviant and therefore queer, is hereby emphasised. In addition, attitudes that are considered heteronormative according to queer theory have been found by analysing how the characters perceive each other. However, it is important to stress that queer theory has also been criticised for being too far-fetched, focusing so enthusiastically on deviances, that everything that is considered too normal is wrong. This brings forward the emphasis on different identities like being gay, black, or woman. Queer theory rejects all identities and categorisations by deconstructing them (Eng, 2006). Though, queer theory seeks to be as justifying as possible, it might easily “shoot itself in the foot”. Queer theory seems to focus so much on all the deviant identities that does not match the heterosexual matrix and resulting in a failure to include the ones that want to live a normal life. David in *Sfu* for instance, can be criticised in queer theoretical terms for wanting to live as a normal family (almost as a nuclear family). The idea of having a desire to be part of the heteronormative pattern is wrong, can be challenged. I believe that queer theory is focusing too much on what falls outside the heterosexual matrix that it fails to avoid categorisations. Their constructionist approach also suggests that being gay is a choice that it is something we *live*, and thereby constructed (Butler, 1990). In this way their ideas undermine the long struggle for acceptance from the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender movement (GLBT), which opposes this by claiming that it is not a choice to be of a different sexuality. No matter what, identities and categorisations will always exist, and that is why, in many ways, this theory seems a bit far-fetched. Still, it is interesting to apply in the textual analysis because it is so un-definable but

also easy to prove your assumptions about different sexualities when using the heterosexual matrix. The theory is easily applied to textual analysis by using the ideas about the heteronorm, which defines normality. The attitudes that keep repressing gay culture and life are to a greater extent presented through the heteronorm. In this way I agree with queer theory. To enhance, there are dominant attitudes in society (the heteronorm) which take every other sexuality besides heterosexuality for granted. Thus, the queer theory reminds us of this fact. *Six feet under* and *Queer as folk* are in a way challenging the heteronormative attitudes in society by portraying explicit gay material, which many are still struggling to accept. The problem here is thus that dichotomies between the normal and queer are even more distinguished, and hence the central notions of queer theory which seeks to deconstruct identities (Butler, 1990), with its dichotomies, are in fact challenged and devalued. We can here see how queer theory may be not as valid as we assumed it to be. Still, the perspective has helped in making some very interesting conclusions about *Sfu* and *Qaf*. Moreover, textual analysis is simply a subjective interpretation where theories are used to help in making a point. Queer theory has indeed helped in this way by focusing on what is queer and what is not, and hence also reinforced the ideas of prejudice against gay men. When this is linked with stereotypes of gay men, the result is that there is a double emphasis on prejudice, which indeed was intended.

So how is the concept of masculinity relevant in this thesis? Gay men encompass their own masculinities that are considered among gender researchers for being a subordinate form in the patriarchy under a hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005). The theories on masculinities are part of the gender research tradition, just as queer theory is, and can be thus linked together. When this is emphasised and applied into the textual analysis, the stereotypes are even more explicit. By focusing on gay masculinities, the stereotypes of the effeminate man or the hyper-masculine clone are brought forward. Thus, the theories of masculinities help in understanding how the gay men are represented, and, more importantly, provide insights about the reasons for these representations. The distinction between the heterosexual masculinities with gay ones are, thus contributing in narrowing down the analysis into that of gay stereotypes based on prejudice, by applying the context of male heterosexual behavioural patterns.

Conclusion

It is revealed to a certain extent how far gay-themed material has come in television when taking *Six feet under* and *Queer as folk* into consideration. The two shows together give an insight into representations of gay characters in television from the 1990s until today in the western world, though it is important to stress that they are not representing the entire medium of television. Stereotypes of gay men have been analysed, while using the theoretical frameworks of queer theory, masculinities, stereotypes, and mise-en-scene. A semiotic textual analysis was conducted in order to reveal how the gay characters were represented and if they met any known stereotypes. The conclusion is that both series encompass perceived stereotypes of gay men, either through the visual images that carries queer symbols, or within the narrative structure. Moreover, the stereotype of the effeminate gay man is present in both media texts, which suggests that this stereotype penetrates time, cultures, and societies. The inevitable question is, have *Queer as folk* and *Six feet under* really broken any boundaries? The former was in fact re-created in the United States and lasting for as long as five seasons. Though, even if *Qaf* has inspired others to make a similar programme, the American version is perceived as portraying even more stereotypes of gay men. Possibly, this is due to the fact that the producers are not gay themselves and targeting a heterosexual audience, who can be entertained by the funny, tragic, and promiscuous effeminate queens? Perhaps it can be argued that neither *Sfu* nor *Qaf* has acquired the American and British television industry to continue creating gay themed series that portray gay characters as something else besides asexual. The thesis has only focused on the Anglo-American industry because this is the dominate industry in Western Europe, however it would be interesting to look into gay representations in other countries as well. Thus, further research on this area is suggested. What is more, a reception study of *Qaf* and *Sfu* may also be of interest in order to understand how the audience of these programmes perceive the gay characters, and if these portrayals have resulted in an increasing prejudice against gay men or not. Hopefully, there are other television shows that will arrive, which also will challenge the heteronormative attitudes in society, and maybe they can be even less stereotypical and feature increasingly realistic/ natural portrayals of gay men that will help society towards acceptance.

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